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Action and Value: Community, Livelihoods and Indigenous Struggle in Highland Ecuador

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University of Edinburgh

February 2014

Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of collaborative action and notions of value in San Isidro, an indigenous community of c.90 families in Ecuador's central highlands. Drawing on Arendt's theory of action as a mode of human togetherness, it focuses on forms of activity that are both affective (appealing to particular values, principles and practices) and productive (engaging in struggles to reorder social and economic relations). These include communal gatherings, shared work-parties, assemblies, meetings, campaigns and celebrations. Developing work by Lambek and Graeber, the thesis explores how such actions are used to generate different kinds of ethical and material value, the criteria people use to evaluate competing visions of hope and possibility, and the related dynamics of division and cooperation. I argue that such a focus on action and value allows us to build on insights from existing regional literature which tends to interpret indigenous collective action as either predominantly expressive (through cultural revival) or instrumental (in terms of economic and political practice).

A core theme that emerges is how localised expressions of what people hold to be vital or desirable interact with coordinated efforts to defend and secure livelihoods. In San Isidro, such efforts contend with a limited land base, ongoing conflicts rooted in histories of dispossession, and widespread patterns of migratory labour (mainly for shift-work in the Amazon-based oil industry). At the same time, many residents participate in collective work to maintain shared infrastructure, protest against land inequalities, and manage areas of the communally-held páramo hills (registering as a 'comunidad' as recently as 2009). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over fifteen months, I analyse how such collaborative actions are combined with everyday forms of paid and unpaid work, memories of conflict, and a sense of duty toward future generations. Through chapters that focus on shared labour, coordinated campaigns, the legacies of land reform and accounts of labour migration, the thesis also examines how cooperation is fostered within a community that is increasingly diverse in access to resources, income and outlook, and how those involved negotiate the ruptures and tensions that intentional actions entail.

Declaration

This research was primarily funded by the award of a College of Humanities & Social Science Studentship (University of Edinburgh).

This thesis consists of 99,889 words.

I declare that this thesis is my own work, apart from where otherwise indicated, and has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

Tristan Partridge

Edinburgh, 28th February 2014

For J.E.P., in memory

Acknowledgements

This thesis stems from encounters and experiences that were only made possible through the openness and friendship of many people in San Isidro. I spent most time with my immediate adopted family, and forever owe them particular thanks for sharing a spell of their lives with me: Porfirio Allauca, Rocío Copara and their children Pacha, José, Tannia, and tía Sandra Copara and her children, Karen and Christo. Sra Enriqueta and Don Ubaldino were my talkative neighbours, and I learned a lot in conversations with my adoptive *tías/aunts* and *tíos/uncles*: Raúl and Rosa, Lorena, Senaida, Elvia and Leonel, Virginia and Kleber, Yulisa, and all the cousins – especially Geovanny, Christian, Anita, and Diego & Hendry for the chance to play music whilst away from home. For kindness, mirth, sense and spirit, I'm indebted to Sra Zoila, Sra Nicolasa, Don Gonzalo and Glenda Rojas, Don Leandro, Dorila, Pat[rici]o, David, Nelly, Juan-Carlos, Betty, Iván, Myriam, Pavel, Sra Senovia, Sra Avelina, Don Efraín and Sra María, Fabian, Freddy, Carlos, Tannia, Alberto, Don Adán, Danny, Don Norberto, Cyntia, Milton, Sra Pastora and Don Manuel, Don Jorge Llumiquinga, Don Gonzalo and Sra Juana, Sra Luz, Rocío, Virglio and Don Rocendo, Sra Salvadora and family, Jenny, Don Graibi, Sra Teresa Chancusi, Sra Gilma Rojas, Mónica and Ubaldo, Don Manillo, Josselyn and Sra Nancy, prima Carmen, Don Hernán, Hilda, Wilson, Prof. Olmedo, Sra Martha Guamán, Don Enrique, Rodrigo Tucumbi and his family in Rayoloma, all the team at MICC in Latacunga, and everyone else I was fortunate enough to meet.

Fieldwork grew out of friendships and connections that were formed not only in Ecuador on previous visits, but also here in the UK. Special thanks are owed to Teresa Martínez, Michelle Lowe and the late Steve Rubinstein for their advice and contacts, and Esmeralda Yasig for introducing me to life in the Alpamagalag valley. In and around Quito, I'm especially grateful to José Fabara, Isolda, Angelina, Fabricio Guamán and everyone at Casa del Arbol (Quito), Karina, Marcea and Paulina at la Elvirita (Tumbaco), Robinson and Luís (Intag), Fernando Niza, Remigio, Cristina Toapanta and their families (La Esperanza), and especially Fernanda, Javier, Ernesto, Rogelio, Martha, Joanna, Michelle, Don Fermín and Sra Maria at *La Red de Guardianes de Semillas*, and the residents of Comuna Tola Chica where I lived for the first weeks of fieldwork.

The ferocity of Ecuador's immigration service would have been all the more acutely felt were it not for the support I received through affiliation with FLACSO. The assistance went beyond the practical, however. Conversations at FLACSO-Quito were revealing and reassuring in equal measures: I'm very grateful to the various staff, students and faculty there who I met with, especially Xavier Andrade, Carmen Martínez, Carlos de la Torre, Adrian Bonilla, Guillaume Fontaine, and Luciano Martínez.

Singular thanks are reserved for Francesca Bray and Maya Mayblin who, in the role of supervisors, have been patient, tolerant and generous with their time and incisive advice. Also at the University of Edinburgh, I gratefully acknowledge my receipt of

a research studentship from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and owe a debt of thanks to everyone whose company and encouragement have helped bring the writing process to life, staff and students alike: Magnus, Sandy, Jacob, Neil, Janet, Jon, Stefan, Lotte, Ian, Jamie, Casey, Alice, Adi, Joost, Jamie, Richard, Jonathan, Hugo, Nayanika, Naomi, Joshua, Luke, Lucy, Siobhan, Evangelos, Stewart, Sarah, Supurna, Sylvia, Laura, Koreen, Ting Ting, Beginda, Joe, Paul, Lisa, and those connected via STAR, and working further afield: Penny Harvey, Arnar Arnarson, Mark Harris, Kate Swanson, Liz Roberts, Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld, Alysa Handelsman, Marc Becker, Jane Guyer, Caroline, Jenni, Mark, Geoff Goodwin, Stewart Morgan, Graeme Green, Sam Wiseman, Victor, Cornelia, Kristine Latta. There are many others whose words and ideas have kept me going, but none to match the joy stirred by your boundless empathy and resolute embrace of all that's good in the world, Maddie. There's not space enough here, or there, to thank you for everything.

It's true for anyone, but no one else is fortunate enough to share the particular nest of kin that I do. Untold thanks to my parents, Bryony and Gerald, for their love and unwavering support and, for their warmth and wisdom, I thank Maureen, Roland & Julia & Edmund, Tom & Beryl, Robert & Susan, Stu & Becs & co, Geraldine & Dave, and other folk who are similarly stitched in, who I would also like to thank: Iain, Alasdair, Clare, and Calum for dauntless creativity; everyone at Dalmahouse for joy and food; Poppy and Gaia for making resurfacing part of the perpetual research process; Justin & Eva and the view of Rùm from Eigg for inspiration and earthiness. To everyone here, I'm thankful for aye.

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Acronyms

CLOC	<i>Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo</i> Latin American Coordinating Body of Rural Organizations
CNRH	<i>Concejo Nacional de Recursos Hídricos</i> National Council for Water Resources
CODENPE	<i>Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador</i> Development Council of the Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador
CONAIE	<i>Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador</i> Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador
ECUARUNARI	<i>Ecuador Runacunapac Riccharimui</i> Awakening of the Ecuadorian Indian
FENOCIN	<i>Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras</i> National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Organizations
FEPP	<i>Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio</i> Ecuadorian (Populorum Progressio) Fund for Popular Progress
FLACSO	<i>Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales</i> Latin American Social Sciences Institute
FPIE	<i>Fundación Pueblo Indio del Ecuador</i> Foundation for the Indigenous People of Ecuador
IERAC	<i>Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización</i> Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonization
INAR	<i>Instituto Nacional de Riego</i> National Institute of Irrigation
INDA	<i>Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Agrario</i> National Institute of Agrarian Development
INFA	<i>Instituto de la Niñez y la Familia</i> Institute for Childhood and Family (part of MIES)
INERHI	<i>Instituto Ecuatoriano de Recursos Hidráulicos</i> Ecuadorian Institute of Water Resources
INREDH	Regional Foundation for Human Rights Legal Advice <i>La Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos</i> (formerly: <i>Instituto Regional de Derechos Humanos</i>)
IRD	Integrated Rural Development
MICC	<i>Movimiento Indígena y Campesino de Cotopaxi</i> Indigenous and Campesino Movement of Cotopaxi Province
MIES	<i>Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social</i> Ministry for Social and Economic Inclusion
NGOs	Nongovernmental Organizations
OPIJJ	<i>Organización del Pueblo Indígena de Jatun Juigua</i> The Organization of Indigenous Communities in Jatun Juigua (formerly: UOPICJJ)
OSG	<i>Organización de Segundo Grado</i> Second-Level Organization (within the national Indigenous Movement)
OTB	<i>Organización Territorial de Base</i> Territorial Base Organization
PRODEPINE	<i>Proyecto de Desarrollo para los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros del Ecuador</i> Development Project for Indigenous and Black Peoples of Ecuador

SENAGUA	Secretaría Nacional del Agua National Secretariat for Water
UCAC	<i>Unidad de Calidad Ambiental Cotopaxi</i> Cotopaxi Environmental Standards Unit
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UOPICJ	<i>La Unión de Organizaciones de Pueblos Indígenas y Campesinos Jatun Juigua</i> Union of Indigenous Communities and Campesino Organizations in Jatun Juigua
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
UNORCAC	<i>Unión de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas de Cotacachi</i> Union of Peasant and Indigenous Organizations of Cotacachi)

All National Councils, Ministries and Institutes above are part of the Ecuadorian government, unless stated otherwise.

1

San Isidro: An Introduction

I. Overview and Approach

“Thank you, friends, for all your work so far. Let’s see now what more is to be done – and let’s remember where we are, here in the *páramo*, and be grateful for all the work that has been done here in the past...” Myriam Allauca, vice-president of the community, was standing at the top of a small grassy slope, addressing gathered *compañeros* on the second morning of a two-day *minga* (collective work-party). Behind her, a corral dug into the steep hillside, home to the community’s small herd of alpacas. We assembled to hear plans for the day, almost ninety people standing outside the remote, thatched-roof huts that were our base for the weekend, some thirteen miles away from San Isidro itself.

These hills had once been a place of punishment, where until the 1960s bound-labourers working on the *hacienda* estate would be sent to herd the tenant-landlord’s cattle. On this day, more *compañeros* than ever before had come together, carrying out maintenance work on the community’s irrigation-water pipeline. The pipeline had been completed just a year previously, and now the *páramo* landscape was being rediscovered, its water-giving properties put to fresh use. With this, other communal actions had gained momentum, and San Isidro registered legally as an indigenous *comunidad* in 2009. The *minga* was an event that required collaborative labour on a shared infrastructure project, and also one that was imbued with remembrance and conviviality. Work here stirred up the past and, with it, issues around land and memory, conflict and violence, power, division, the legacies of suffering. At the same time, this work sought to address some of the immediate needs of those taking part, and to secure the prospect of livelihoods lived on inherited land.

These needs, conflicts, livelihoods and actions varied considerably. San Isidro was increasingly diverse in terms of the resources people had access to. There were some families who depended entirely on agriculture for their income. For them, the pipeline had transformed their ability to eke out a living from what they could raise and harvest on diminutive plots of land (v. Fig.1). Others, meanwhile, had relatively lucrative manual jobs in the Amazon's oil industry, and as migrant labourers enjoyed the *mingas* as a chance to catch up with friends during their time back home. Cooperation stemmed from common practice, not necessarily from common purpose. Similarly, communal undertakings required varying levels of commitment and sacrifice. In some instances, the forms of action had a deliberate aim – campaigns, construction, conflict-resolution. Collaborating to counteract land inequalities and the effects of histories of dispossession, these were ways to assert a 'capacity and intent to remake a badly crafted social world' (Whitten & Whitten 2011). At other times, the outcomes and consequences of communal action were more elusive. New connections, relationships, perspectives: the diffuse implications of such collective attempts to bring about what people deemed vital or desirable – or both.

Desire, need, power, creativity, political action – anthropological theory that uses notions of *value* to explore these issues soon resembles a theory of Everything That Matters (Demian 2003: 316). However, it also provides a suitable framework for understanding action that is both instrumental and expressive (Foweraker 1995), and which fits between established categories of 'class-based' and 'identity-based' mobilisation in Ecuador, between 'peasant struggles' and 'Indian resistance' (Pallares 2002). Concerns and conflicts in San Isidro stemmed from issues of land, water, resources, and livelihoods – the basis of material needs and value. At the same time, conscious attempts were made to root action in particular *principios* (principles), *valores* (values) and *prácticas* (practices) – moves to create a shared ethical base. I suggest using a *value* framework to examine action in San Isidro allows us to broaden our understanding of different kinds of value, in order to re-examine the dynamics of cooperation.

How is cooperation negotiated amidst a diversity of needs, desires, aspirations and motivations? How are different kinds of material and ethical *value* produced, and how are *values* altered over time? In response to such questions, this thesis uses recent work by Lambek (2008; 2010a/b; 2013) and Graeber (2001; 2005; 2013), among others – an approach to value that argues what is being evaluated are not things, but actions (Graeber 2001: 49). It also seeks to account for the significance attached to particular actions by actors themselves, and to recognise how actors are changed, along with their relations and experiences, through their own activity (Paolucci 2005: 576; Lambek 2013: 155). It draws on experiences of a range of actions in San Isidro: collective-work parties; crisis meetings of the community assembly; regular maintenance of communal infrastructure; events linked to *patrimonio*/patrimony and *desarrollo*/development; everyday agricultural work; and coordinated campaigns against local land inequalities (as part of Ecuador's Indigenous Movement).

Action: Affective and Productive

These different forms of action were collectively undertaken by groups of individuals, always done in the company of others. This – action as a mode of togetherness – is the first of two elements I adopt from Hannah Arendt's theory of action, in order to define its use in my analysis, and to examine how it relates to different kinds of value. It also distinguishes action from other forms of activity, emphasising its cooperative and collaborative aspects, and allows us to approach distinctions that people made in their descriptions of collaborative 'doing.'

Working during a *minga*, attending meetings, contributing to campaigns – these were all ways of doing something *para la comunidad* (for the community), or *como (parte de la) comunidad* (as [part of the/a] community). Participation in such activities was both achieved and recognised in active terms: people would be described on the basis of what they actually *did*, rather than by making financial contributions, or making promises, or in terms of any status attached to their employment or family connections. As such, on an individual level, someone who was seen to do a lot for

the community (*el/ella hace bastante para la comunidad*) would be described as *dedicado/a* (dedicated). Conversely, for example in recruiting people to commit to particular project, a shortage of willing participants was described as a lack of *gente comprometida* (committed people). On the level of collectivities, sustained effort and harmonious action would result in the community being regarded as *organizada* (well-organized), which was thought of as something to be created and maintained.

This thesis explores forms of action that directly influence ongoing processes of deliberation and intervention in the collective organisation of the community, and thus not all forms of ‘togetherness’ are investigated as *action*. Wibbelsman (2009: 20) develops the idea that ‘community *is* where community *happens*,’ looking at how certain (ritual) practices become contexts of *communitas* – a “spontaneous, immediate, self-generating interrelatedness (Turner 1974).” Dialogue, interaction, human intimacy – all these might feature in action, but the forms I focus on are distinct by virtue of their productive, deliberate, intentional or practical character. This is action which, through a variety of methods, seeks to intervene in, contest and redirect forces and flows of domination and inequality (Lambek 2013; Holloway 2002; Foucault 1980; Kenrick 2011b). As such, the annual fiestas in San Isidro – an event shared collectively and a moment where community could most definitely be said to be *happening* – are not analysed in detail. The acts of celebration I explore in Chapter 7, meanwhile, took place specifically within a context of identifying *patrimonio* for use in future projects. For Arendt, this is action that takes place in ‘public,’ in spaces where “people mutually constitute themselves in the act of directly deliberating with each other about how to run their polity¹” (Feldman 2013: 173). I address action that takes place both in formal, prescribed settings, and in more informal or irregular settings – and both involve the negotiation of competing plans, projections and expectations (v. ‘Ethical Value(s),’ below).

¹ As Rapport points out, ‘polity’ in Arendt’s work is used to refer to “the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together” (Rapport 2013: 160, citing Arendt 1958: 198). The notion of a ‘public’ realm or ‘space’ is examined further in Chapter 5, in relation to the practice of community assemblies.

This focus also serves to distinguish my approach from two identifiable trends in the regional literature. One interprets ongoing cooperative action in indigenous communities primarily as reflective of cultural persistence or revival, particularly through ritual practice (eg. Wibbelsman 2009; Corr 2010). The second emphasises certain economic strategies and material gains that emerge from coordinated action, particularly through artisanal trade (eg. Latta 2011; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). My analysis combines elements of each, and is concentrated on forms of action in San Isidro that are both affective (appealing to particular principles and practices) and productive (engaging in struggles to reorder social and economic relations) – even, or especially, when the outcomes of action are uncertain.



Figure 1 – View overlooking San Isidro from the hillside near La Playa. Patricio Copara leads animals laden with supplies for a week of work in the páramo. To the right of the frame are the large, flat fields of the hacienda; to the left the clustered hillside plots of San Isidro homesteads. Volcano Cotopaxi is visible on the horizon.

Action, Labour, Work

Arendt makes distinctions between three types of human activity: (i) *labour*, which sustains the patterns of consumption and production that are vital to life, and operates within the cyclical processes of the growth and decay of human bodies; (ii) *work*,

which results in the durable end products of fabrication – the constructed, artificial world of objects that surrounds, supports and contains us; (iii) *action*, which is the intersubjective, intangible affirmation of existence and identity (Arendt 1958: 7ff., 193, 234). Action is also inherently social and ‘never possible in isolation’ (Arendt 1958: 188).

Dealing with ideal ‘types,’ Arendt’s theory of action has also been criticised for glorifying the *acts of action* as affirmations of individual identity, the performance (in a public domain) of ‘exemplary’ deeds that allow the actor to ‘overcome futility and mortality’ (d’Entrèves 1994: 65, 84; Parekh 1981; Parekh 2008) – as if to ‘transcend mere productive activity’ (Arendt 1958: 180). Action, in this sense, is not ‘productive.’ *Labour*, meanwhile, is characterised as the activity of people ‘obeying the same imperatives’, and in *work* the maker is still subordinate to the product – it is said to be “only in *action* and speech, in interacting with others through words and deeds and initiating common projects, that individuals reveal who they personally are and can affirm their unique identities” (d’Entrèves 1994: 73). Acts are thus idealized, and their value is only “established after the fact, that is, retrospectively, in historical narrative. [Their] value is ascertained through the kind of story into which [they are] placed” (Lambek 2013: 148). For Graeber, this limits *action* to types of activity that are ‘narrativizable’ – “things done in order to be recounted, talked about, and remembered afterward” (Graeber 2007: 133, 414).

However, as Fuss (1979), Parekh (1981) and d’Entrèves (1994) point out, there are not one but two models of action in Arendt’s work: one is *expressive* and concerned with the kind of glorified, ‘heroic’ and idealized acts critiqued above (d’Entrèves 1994: 84-5). The second, by contrast, emphasises the role of social interaction in both the execution and the recognition of acts: this *communicative* model of action is concerned with the ‘participatory’ nature of action, and thus with its role in fostering solidarity and togetherness (d’Entrèves 1994: 98, and developed further by Habermas 1984, 1987a). The two, of course, interact – but ‘communicative action’ is linked to the ‘associative’ model of the public sphere, proposed in feminist readings of Arendt, as a deliberative space in which to test boundaries and understandings of

action/labour/work, public/private, and ‘the political’ more broadly (Benhabib 1993: 110; Benhabib 1996: 201; Honig 1995; Dietz 1995). In such deliberations, ‘failure is a likely prospect’ and thus action reflects people’s ‘willingness to take the chance’ rather than “an impoverished assessment of the obstacles they confront” (Feldman 2013: 173-4). ‘Communicative action’ in this sense is also closer to ‘social action’ (Weber 1922) and ‘practical action’ (Sahlins 1981: 35) in that it generates relationships which ‘revalue’ the conceptions and categories (the ‘narratives’) that both motivate the acting subjects and, in turn, lead to the formation of new categories and descriptions of action (ibid.).

Drawing on Arendt, then, in this thesis I use *action* to refer to different kinds of activity that are distinct from work and labour, and yet are capable of being both productive and affective, and which further relate to value in particular ways: (i) action is a mode of togetherness, which always depends on and establishes relationships (Arendt 1958: 190)²; (ii) the ‘products’ or ‘outcomes’ of action are not limited to the material or quantifiable, and include ‘consequences’ that are unpredictable and unforeseen (Arendt 1958: 190-1); (iii) these ‘products’ and ‘outcomes’ generate different kinds of material and ethical value (Lambek 2013). Each of these elements is clarified in the next section.

Anthropology, Value and Action

Graeber argues that value is at the heart of anthropological inquiry when we see social worlds ‘not just as a collection of persons and things’ but instead as ‘a project of mutual creation, as something collectively made and remade’ (Graeber 2013: 222;

² Ortner describes three forms of *practice* - often analytically paralleled with *action* (Giddens 1994; Bourdieu 1977; Parsons & Shils 1951; Ortner 1984). The closest to *action* is the third, although still lacking Arendt’s emphasis on the sociality of *action*: (i) *practice* as ‘routine or repetitive or ordinary or everyday activity’ - this is closer to *labour*; (ii) as ‘intentional action’ where agents enact their ‘interests and desires’ and ‘pursue their goals and plans’ - this is closer to *work* because it ‘shares the logic of routine everyday life’ in which its products are quantifiable and discrete; (iii) as the Marxist notion of *praxis* or the ‘sustained engagement in activity built on an alternative logic’ - this parallels *action* (Ortner 1989: 194-5). Whitten (2003: 397) uses the term ‘social praxis’ to emphasise the sociality of productive-affective activity, or *action* as it has been defined here. Throughout the thesis, I reserve double quotation marks for direct quotations (citing either fieldwork sources or secondary material) and single punctuation marks for paraphrased material, terms under discussion or quotations within a citation.

2001). Most anthropological accounts of value have focused on objects (Lambek 2013: 155), a tradition that has its origins in Mauss and his central question: “what is it about giving a gift that makes the recipient feel compelled to return a counter-gift of roughly equal value?” (Graeber 2001: 36)³. This approach focuses on comparison and circulation of the value of objects in processes of exchange, whether via the ‘ranking’ of objects in gift economics (Gregory 1982), or through seeing value as ‘making relations visible’ (Strathern 1988) and recognising objects as placed within a ‘set of categories’ (Graeber 2001: 35-44).

Another approach, adopted here, is based in Marxian thought and developed by Turner (2008; 1991; 1979) and Munn (1986) as detailed by Graeber (2001), and subsequently explored further by Lambek (2008; 2010a/b; 2013) and others (Pedersen 2008a/b; Pedersen & Eiss 2002; Otto & Willerslev 2013a/b). This explores the relationship between ‘values’ and ‘value,’ and Lambek’s work emphasises the production of different *kinds* of value. Underpinning this approach is the idea that value “ultimately measures the importance not of objects, but of actions” and evaluates how “human beings exercise their imaginative powers to create their worlds, their social ties as well as their physical environments” (Graeber 2005: 450). Uzendoski (2004: 884) defines value from an anthropological perspective as “a cultural system of human productive action by which people relate to one another socially and intersubjectively” but cautions that value becomes a ‘murky concept’ if divorced from ‘productive purposes and cycles’ (Damon 2002a: 239). The Marxian approach in anthropology has addressed itself to these very issues, in the process developing an account of value of different kinds.

Material Value

Social theory has used ‘value’ in three different spheres: “*values* in the sociological sense (conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life); *value* in the economic sense (the degree to which objects are desired, particularly as

³ “The material gift, in effect, is the objectification of the value *generated in acts* of giving and receiving (including prior *acts*)” (Lambek 2013: 151, emphasis added).

measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them); and *value* in the linguistic sense (which goes back to the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1966), and might be most simply glossed as ‘meaningful difference’))” (Graeber 2001: 2-3). Value in the linguistic sense can be determined, is always relative, and is definitive: “the conceptual value of the sign is fixed by relationships with co-existing signs. By its contrasts with the other signs of its (systemic) environment, its own sense or conceptual value is sedimented. The value of ‘green’ is determined by the presence alongside it of ‘blue,’ and vice versa” (Sahlins 1981: 4). This perspective raises difficult questions regarding the creation of value, since “it deterministically considers value production in terms of its outcomes of long-term adaptation and its properties as a closed system” and thus “leaves little or no room for human agency” (Widlok 2013: 23). Recent anthropological work on value has instead focused on the relation between ‘calculated, economic, material value and moral, sociological, ethical values’ (ibid.) which are inextricably linked to activity.

Economic theory has tended toward articulating value as price, devising models to establish the comparative market worth of objects, distinguishing intrinsic value from utility (in terms of both use-value and the purchasing power of exchange-value), and moving away from the question of what might motivate people to want the things they wanted (Graeber 2005: 443). Within this system, commodities are the ‘simplest social form in which the product of labour presents itself in society’ (Aumeeruddy & Tortajada 1979: 3), and they are distinguishable from one another only relatively – that is, the value of a commodity is always realised relative to another (Kay 1979: 63; Arthur 1979: 68-9). The labour theory of value is based on the idea that the value of commodities is established by the amount of human labour used in its production – the commodity, then, is both a ‘product’ of labour and an ‘abstract coagulate’ (a representative measure of) human activity (Arthur 1979: 84)⁴.

⁴ This is the position associated with Adam Smith and David Ricardo, whereas Marx questioned “the assumption that aspects or products of practical human life could ever be represented adequately by a price in money” (Pedersen & Eiss 2002: 284). Although Marx ‘never made any systematic inquiry into what value is’ nor endeavoured “to prove its existence per se (Elson 1979)” (ibid.), he questioned why “such equivalences [of the products of human activity and price-in-money] come to appear rational, natural, even eternal, in capitalist society. How is it that ‘labor is expressed in value’ and the ‘measurement of labor by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product?’ (Marx 1984 [1867]: 80)” (Pedersen & Eiss 2002: 284).

People's motivations and desires – their values – and questions of what 'human actors are ultimately trying to achieve in life' are excluded from the calculations (Graeber 2005: 439)⁵.

Ethical Value(s)

To account for peoples' diverse motivations and desires in action, Graeber argues for a focus on 'actions and processes' rather seeing the world as neatly divided into discrete objects of quantifiable value – and that human activity not be reduced only to 'ends' and 'products' (Graeber 2011: 91). In this, value is both a material consequence of activity, and "an object of subjective struggles to acquire and accumulate that drive the entire system of social production" (Turner 2008: 51). This view underpins one approach to the difference between 'values' in the sociological sense and 'value' in the economic sense. 'Values' is normally invoked "to refer to all those domains of human action that are not governed by the laws of the market: thus we hear about family values, spiritual values, values in the domains of art and political ideals. In other words, 'values' begin precisely where (economic) 'value' ends" (Graeber 2005: 444). Lambek emphasises how the production of material goods also produces social relations and conditions, and that the *quality* of the experience of value production is of utmost importance: "labor is not to be measured quantitatively, as pure time spent, but discerned in the quality of the act... with respect to ethical rather than simply economic value" (Lambek 2008: 148-9; Pedersen 2008b: 72). Thus, the importance that actors attach to (i) the relational process of creating value, and (ii) the relational significance of things produced, both contribute to people's understandings of 'values.'

⁵ Similarly, Arendt critiqued the utilitarian relationship of means and ends as the basis of value (Meade 1996: 119). If "an object that has much work put into it is more valuable than a mass-produced item" and "an object that was inexpensive to manufacture but is in high demand [is] more valuable than one for which demand is low" then "the means/end relationship excludes the possibility of anything having intrinsic merit (worth) because the value of the object is derived solely from its relationship either to another object or to a buyer" (ibid.). In these utilitarian terms, "nothing can exist as an end in itself" and "every end serves in turn as a means to another end" such that "values are divested of all meaning" (Meade 1996: 119; Arendt 1958: 154-5). Arendt also argued that if all values are, in this way, ultimately exchange values, then "one set of values may be easily exchanged for another – one need only commit to one's values for as long as they are either effective or fashionable" (Meade 1996: 118) – a reading that does not account for ethical value(s).

A second approach to ‘values’ draws on Kluckhohn’s definition of them as *conceptions of the desirable*: ideas that influence “the choices people make between different possible courses of action (1951: 395)... the criteria by which people decide whether specific desires are legitimate and worthwhile, or not” and ideas about what ‘one could justifiably want from life’ (Graeber 2005: 446). This is a broader notion than his ‘value orientations’ which are “assumptions about the ends and purposes of human existence, what human beings have a right to expect from each other and the gods, [and] about what constitutes fulfilment and frustration (Kluckhohn 1949: 358-9)” (Graeber 2005: 446). Following Lambek, I suggest that action generates ‘outcomes’ which are ‘values’ in the broader sense – expectations, and criteria for the evaluation of other people and future actions. These are, then, values that are ‘incommensurable’ (they cannot be compared, unlike the comparative values of the market), and that influence people’s plans and assumptions. A plurality of values forces choices, perhaps especially in a small community where the consequences of competing moral commitments are close to hand (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 14). Action also causes conflict, then, as it creates ideas about the legitimacy, desirability, and purposes of future actions, and about what it is that people can reasonably expect from the world, and from each other (Lambek 2013: 149; Graeber 2011: 10).

In his use and account of ethical value, Lambek focuses specifically on the incommensurable outcomes of ‘acts’ – where acts are forms of ‘doing’ or *praxis* (I address ‘acts’ and ‘action’ in relation to ‘evaluation’ in Chapter 2). He contrasts acts/doing/*praxis* with *labour* (production/*poiesis*) – the latter responsible for creating the commensurable values of the market (Lambek 2013). I draw on Lambek’s account of the creation of ethical value in acts, to explore the parallel case of action as I have defined it: a relational activity whose ‘outcomes’ include unpredictable and *incommensurable* ‘consequences’ (which go on to shape future actions). By distinguishing action from labour – making (*poiesis*) from doing (*praxis*) – Lambek’s work reflects Arendt’s distinction between *labour/work/poiesis* and *action/praxis*.

As Lambek says himself, however, the distinction between making and doing is not always obvious (Lambek 2013: 144) and it is in this space that *action*, as I am using it, fits. Action can create *both* material and ethical value, and the ethical sense of value is “distinguished from the utilitarian [or material] one insofar as ends and means are conjoined in ethical value and separated in utilitarian or market value” (Lambek 2013: 142)⁶. In this process, where means and ends are often conflated, action also generates experiences, which can present themselves as sought after, as valuable, and which consequently motivate future actions. One could talk of ‘experiential value’ (an idea I explore in Chapter 3), but this is also another form of ‘ethical value’ since an ‘experience’ is also a ‘*transformation* effected in a person’ (Lambek 2013: 149).

‘Ethical value,’ then, refers to ‘values in the sociological sense’ (above). That is, different forms of ethical value *transform* relations between actors, influence future actions, create criteria people use to evaluate competing desires and priorities, and shape people’s expectations of each other (Graeber 2005: 446; Kluckhohn 1949, 1951; Lambek 2010b, 2013). The ‘value vs values’ conundrum is not settled there, however, since “questions remain whether value is in some sense a transhistorical concept or particular to an economic system (capitalism) and to what degree parsing the economic from the ethical is peculiar to speakers of English” (Lambek 2013: 142). Nonetheless, I suggest that distinguishing between material value and ethical value, and considering how different forms of *action* create different forms of each, can provide us with a framework for understanding how cooperation is fostered among actors with diverse motivations and desires. For example, in a community that is increasingly diverse in access to resources, income and outlook – such as San Isidro.

⁶ Graeber does not distinguish between ‘material value’ and ‘ethical value’ and instead maintains that value “is the way our actions take on meaning or importance by becoming incorporated into something larger than ourselves” (Graeber 2005: 451), becoming meaningful in relation to ‘some larger system of meaning’ (Graeber 2005: 453; Graeber 2001: 67), or “in some socially recognized form, a form that is both material and symbolic” (Graeber 2013: 225) but “almost always some kind of material medium” (ibid.). I examine these points in Chapter 2 (in relation to the ‘descriptions’ applied to actions), Chapter 5 (social recognition) and Chapter 7 (shared narratives of struggle).

Value, Values, Research Questions

Bourdieu addressed the ‘slippage between values and value’ through the relation between ‘symbolic and economic capital’ (Sutton 2004: 374). Following Lambek (2013) and Graeber (2001), I argue here that his approach does not account for ethical value – which is generated in the *quality* of acts, and in the *products* of acts that are *not reducible to economics* (Lambek 2013).

For Bourdieu, capital in all its varieties is accumulated labour, and symbolic value is derived from ‘social acts of recognition’ (akin to expressive action, above) – and yet these acts are always ‘secondary to labour’ due to “the brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics” (Bourdieu 1997: 54; Lambek 2013: 145). In doing this, Bourdieu prioritizes scarcity, competition and exclusion – such that all value is reducible to economic value (ibid.). Bourdieu locates value primarily in the ends rather than the means of action (Lambek 2008: 136). This overlooks the importance and significance that people attach to ‘purposeful activity’ and to the social production of value, beyond simply ‘the consumption of satisfactions’ (Macpherson 1973: 5). For Bourdieu, value is still primarily the measure of objects, relations and dispositions (that store ‘capital’) rather than of the quality of acts/actions and their various ‘outcomes’ (Lambek 2008: 136).

As such, in this model any distinction between economic value and symbolic value is ultimately rendered inconsequential due to Bourdieu’s insistence that human action never ceases to be ‘maximising.’ He maintains that ‘economic calculation’ extends to *all* goods, ‘material and symbolic, without distinction’ – goods that can include ‘complements or attention, challenges or insults, powers or pleasures... distinction or distinctions’ (Bourdieu 1977: 177-8, at Graeber 2001: 28-9). There are two main critiques of this position. The first is that it too artificially equates what might be very different kinds of the pursuit of value: “if one might as easily be maximizing wealth, or smiles, what’s the point of describing it as ‘maximizing’ at all?” (Graeber

2001: 265)⁷. Linked to this is the second critique, detailed by Lambek, that not all value (as Bourdieu's different forms of capital) can be seen as accumulated labour, since some forms of activity are to be distinguished from labour. For Lambek, these forms of activity include 'acts' whose products are not reducible to economics (Lambek 2013: 145) – here, they also include *action*.

Action, then, can generate not only objects and material value, but also consequences, criteria and transformations, all of which are forms of ethical value. These various 'outcomes' derive from the 'quality' or experience of *action*, and from the interactions that constitute (and occur during) participation in *action*. *Consequences* shape motivations for future actions, and influence people's expectations of each other. *Criteria* are used in 'the guidance and evaluation of subsequent actions' (Lambek 2010b; Lambek 2013: 147-9), and action might also 'effect transformations in the persons and conditions involved,' for example in the way that an apology *transforms* relations between the two parties (Lambek 2013: 149).

These forms of ethical value affect how we understand intentionality. I follow Jackson's account of action in considering how these 'consequences' and transformations go on to divert the course of future actions. He describes how the process of action changes actors themselves, and their intentions, suggesting that our ever-shifting attempts to 'create the conditions of viable existence and coexistence' do not always depend on forming 'any conscious idea of our intentions before we act' (Jackson 2005: xv). In this sense, most human action is unreflective (Merleau-Ponty 1962) and yet it does not follow that action is then merely a response to habits, or to the imperatives of hunger. Rather, it reflects a series of ways to engage with the

⁷ Ortner (1984: 152) makes a similar case for motivation in action without resorting to the 'worn-out' and maximising 'interest theory.' As we have seen, action creates different kinds of ethical value in the form of criteria and ideas about the legitimacy and desirability of future courses of action, and about the nature of expectation in relationships between actors (Lambek 2013: 149; Graeber 2011: 10). This recognises that the outcomes of action are open-ended and uncertain – or 'boundless' in Arendt's terms (1958: 190) – and that action is not only concerned with specific goals. Ortner follows Gramsci (1957) arguing that "action in a developmental or 'projects' perspective is more a matter of 'becoming' than of 'getting'" and that within this perspective there is a sense of "motive and action as shaped not only by problems being solved, and gains being sought, but by images and ideals of what constitutes goodness – in people, in relationships, and in conditions of life" (Ortner 1984: 152).

world as a ‘field of instrumental possibilities’ (Sartre 1948: 53-58) – possibilities that are variously provided, denied, achieved or sought by us, and to us (Jackson 2005: xv). Intentionality, then, can be changed in action as well as being what initially prompts people to action.

This thesis investigates how collective action in San Isidro generates different kinds of ethical and material value. In doing so, it examines how the various ‘consequences, criteria and transformations’ of *action* shape and influence: *principios* (principles), such as the defense of communal lands (Chapter 6); *valores* (values), such as respect for the authority of the community assembly (Chapter 5); *prácticas* (practices), such as *mingas* (collective work-parties – Chapter 3); and also people’s (often conflicting) views and choices of different courses of action; how people assess whether certain desires or goals are legitimate or viable (and for what reasons); and how these dynamics of division and collaboration are put to use, negotiated⁸ or overcome in the pursuit of livelihoods.

II. Fieldwork

Much analytical work, and political rhetoric, sees the challenges faced by rural groups as hopelessly terminal, and subsequently paints a bleak picture of doomed futures (Robertson 2012). The ‘assumed inevitability’ of rural decline, however, is rooted in constructions of modernity which hold that the modern world, even progress itself, is ‘predicated on the erosion of collective obligation’, and on the disintegration of material, moral and social commonalities (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 27-8; Appadurai 1990: 18). This narrative devalues localised practices in two ways: (i) it places rural populations somehow ‘outside history’ (Anderson 1991; Parry 2007), and (ii) implies that only analysts and people in positions of power are

⁸ Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009: 107) makes the point that in highland community settings such as this, collective work is “better thought of as negotiation than cooperation,” and thus cooperation is better thought of as something which is itself negotiated, rather than achieved. This echoes Graeber’s point, above, that analysis of action amidst diverse and competing visions should focus on ‘actions and processes’ rather than on fixed states, quantifiable ends or products (2011: 91).

in any way capable of recognising such forces, or of doing anything about them (Taussig 1989; Asad 1992; Robertson 2012). On the contrary, countless rural social movements and indigenous organisations have directly intervened in, redirected, and reimagined these trajectories – revealing in their actions just how socio-culturally specific the origins/narratives of dominant ‘historical inevitability’ are (Kenrick 2011a; Blaser et al 2004). These were the issues my fieldwork set out to explore. This was to ask, what happens when people deliberately adapt the material, moral and social relations they value to the ever-shifting contours of contemporary life? How are these commonalities – particular ideas, relations and resources that are deemed effective, important or valuable – altered and (re)constructed? When they are used as the basis of collaborative efforts, what kinds of action are pursued and undertaken, and why?

To Cotopaxi

Ten months before I left Scotland for fieldwork, I made a three-week trip to Ecuador. Two friends who had previously worked and researched in the country had very kindly shared with me their contacts list – invaluable assistance in meeting individuals and organisations involved in agrarian activism. I wanted to know how nominal governmental support for *food sovereignty* (written into the 2008 Constitution) had impacted – if at all – on their work and livelihoods. I met with Carmen, Luis and Robinson and his family in Intag, Fernando in La Esperanza (both in the north of the country, toward Otavalo), then Martha and Rogelio in Tumbaco, and Fernanda and Javier from *la Red de Guardianes de Semillas* (‘Seed Guardians’ Network,’ just on the outskirts of Quito).

I was also able to spend time in the offices of MICC (the Indigenous and Campesino Movement of Cotopaxi province⁹) in Latacunga (v. Map 1). There, I met with Diocelinda Iza, Fernando Ruíz and Rodrigo Tucumbi (who lived in Rayoloma, in the

⁹ MICC *Movimiento Indígena y Campesino de Cotopaxi* / the Indigenous and Campesino Movement of Cotopaxi Province. MICC is a ‘third tier’ (Bretón 2008: 584) organization in the national Indigenous Movement – a federation of federations such as OPIJJ, below – operating across the province of Cotopaxi.

hills above San Isidro). They told me of the most pressing issues facing rural communities across Cotopaxi province: conflicts over access to water, both within and between communities, and in dispute with the many ('thirsty') broccoli and floriculture plantations; land shortages; a lack of access to medical care in the more remote areas; and a recent focus on *páramo* conservation (in the face of an increasing number of intensive pine forestry programs which drained the land dry). Sra Iza told me, "only if we have land, and we have water, can we have 'food sovereignty.'" It was Rodrigo who, when I came back, introduced me to the Alpamalay valley, inviting me to a biennial *Congreso* (planning meeting) for OPIJJ¹⁰, held a couple of miles north of San Isidro in Aldea Modelo.

It took a few weeks to arrange somewhere to live in Cotopaxi, though, and I started my fieldwork living back with Martha and Rogelio in the indigenous community of *Comuna Tola Chica*. It was located on the outskirts of Tumbaco, which presented its own challenges. This wealthy suburb of the capital was sprawling. Land around the comuna could be sold to developers for astronomical prices. Registered as a *comuna* in 1944, the communal land that belonged to 'Tola Chica' was increasing in value day by day, and there had been a split in the community. It was an introduction for me to periodically violent conflict within a community, disputing the most valuable way to use (or sell) land.

I had been in Ecuador just less than a month when October 12th arrived. I attended the protest in Quito which had been organised by CLOC¹¹ and La Vía Campesina to reclaim what had once most prominently been celebrated as the date of Columbus' arrival in the Americas – a march for 'agrarian revolution' and rights for small farmers. It had been organised as part of the CLOC 5th Congress, entitled: Against the Ravages of Capital and Empire – For the Earth and Sovereignty of Our Peoples –

¹⁰ OPIJJ: *Organización del Pueblo Indígena de Jatun Juigua* / The Organization (formerly: 'Union') of Indigenous Communities in Jatun Juigua. OPIJJ is a 'second-tier federation' within the national Indigenous Movement (Bretón 2008: 584). Throughout the highlands, these 'second-tier organizations' (or OSGs: *organizaciones de segundo grado*) are made up of communities, cooperatives and associations. In the case of OPIJJ, this is a 'union' of fifteen Indigenous Communities, of which San Isidro is one.

¹¹ *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo* / Latin American Coordinating Committee of Rural Organisations.

America Resists!”, and elsewhere: ‘For The Right To Land and For Food Sovereignty.’ There were presentations, workshops, discussion groups, and folk attending from all over the continent. The critique, rhetoric, vision was emphatic: rural groups need to be supported in their efforts to maintain small-scale agriculture, to continue thriving in places where their skills and experiences are valued and appropriate.



Map 1 – (l) Ecuador within South America, and San Isidro’s location in Cotopaxi province, in relation to Quito and national/provincial boundaries and locations; (r) San Isidro’s location on the western edge of the inter-Andean plain, in the foothills of the Western cordillera.

San Isidro is c.80 miles from the capital.

Whether this was called food sovereignty or something else, underpinning most groups’ demands and grievances were a need for increased control over the food systems they were a part of, greater protection of rights (land rights, human rights), and better access to life-sources (land and water). Personal testimonies gave accounts of horrific injustices suffered at the hands of various governments and corporations. I wondered how people in these communities went about organising their lives and struggles amidst such hardships. The seemingly universal ‘issues’ – experienced in particular ways all over Latin America – echoed those I had been told about in the office of MICC. I wanted to go back to Cotopaxi province, and find out more. The ‘field’ in fieldwork was taking shape and, just as “the field begins with and forever

includes the fieldworker” (Taussig 2009: 116), it also began with my ‘false expectations,’ ready to be formed and transformed through ‘creative misunderstandings’ with newfound friends (ibid.).

The Alpamalag Valley

I first met Porfirio whilst visiting with Esmeralda Yasig in *Cinco de Junio*, just a mile or so further up the Alpamalag valley from San Isidro. A small community, *Cinco de Junio* sits to the east of the Pujilí-Cusubamba road. On the opposite side there is a vast hacienda plantation growing broccoli for export. Through *la Red de Guardianes* I had been put in touch with Esmeralda as an ‘associate’ of the network, based on her work with native seed varieties in Alpamalag, and the Training Centre she had built with local *jovenes*/young people. Given my interest in basing my fieldwork in the area, she had invited Porfirio over to tell me about life in San Isidro – their work in the *páramo* hills, the recently completed irrigation-pipeline project, their conflict with the hacienda, the absence of most men of working age due to labour migration, campaigns against the plantations. He suggested that, if I really wanted to see what the community had been doing, I should spend time working in the *páramo*. The following week, I was making the hike up from San Isidro with Patricio, trailing a donkey laden with firewood and our provisions for seven days, and my fieldwork had begun in earnest. From then on, I spent one week per month on average in the *páramo*.

Back in San Isidro, I lived with Porfirio and his partner, Rocío, along with their three children: Pachacutic (‘Pacha,’ 16 at the time), Jumandy (‘José,’ 13) and Tannia (9). I slept in a room under the ‘meeting hall’ Porfirio had built with a donation through FPIE¹² in 1997. It functioned almost like a second *casa comunal* – sometimes host to a youth group, on rare occasions a Kichwa lesson, and often a late-night meeting between members of the *directiva* (community council). My room opened out onto a

¹² FPIE: *la Fundación Pueblo Indio del Ecuador* / The ‘Foundation for the Indigenous People of Ecuador:’ a charitable organisation formed by Monseñor L. Proaño in 1988. He was the most visible proponent of Liberation Theology in Ecuador, and the work of FPIE – campaigning, advocacy, education and network support – continues today in that vein.

yard shared with the house and kitchen-building belonging to Porfirio's parents, Sra Enriqueta and Don Ubaldino. Further up the hill, on the same 1-hectare plot, were the homes of other family-members and their families: the number of people I counted as friends grew exponentially through an extended network of aunts, uncles, cousins, friends and their friends.

I kept in touch with Rodrigo and staff at MICC. I would occasionally attend meetings (workshops, network planning sessions) at their offices, and travel with the MICC-TV reporters as they covered news events and marches in Quito or Latacunga (an indigenous leader from Zumbahua had been imprisoned at that time on trumped-up charges for his opposition to the new Water Law). With them and Rodrigo I also visited other communities in the area (Rayoloma, Yacubamba, La Playa, Tuglín). Through connections made there, I could visit various places independently (Planchaloma, Chirimbe, San Gerardo, San Antonio, Guarangál, Cruz Pampa) – but such activities were spread sparsely.

In San Isidro, during the day, most anyone who hadn't travelled away for paid employment was at work in the fields. This meant a lot of my conversations took place outside, alongside people planting, sowing, weeding, cutting alfalfa, repairing terraces, harvesting. A willingness to dig in with an *azadon*/hoe and share the work – especially during *mingas* – generally made people more forgiving of my inquisitiveness. It seemed to make sense to a lot of people that someone would want to learn about San Isidro – there was an awareness that San Isidro was unlike neighbouring communities, with its unusually high percentage of migrant workers heading to *el Oriente*, and the recent successes of their various communal campaigns and endeavours.

This prompted questions more specific than those I had arrived with. When the community was seen as a collective endeavour in this way, often reference was made to *la lucha*, the need to keep on fighting (*seguir luchando*) and particular individuals admired as being a true *luchador*, taking part in the struggle (v. Chapter 7). It wasn't always framed as *la lucha indígena* either – it seemed more particular. I wondered

why people felt it was important to keep fighting: fighting what, or what was under threat? what were the threats? MICC, as a representative body, had an interest in representing themselves as visible and viable in their domain. I wondered if people living in San Isidro placed much faith in outside organisations – of any kind – and whether they were considered to be much help in the struggle to secure access to water. If not, was the expectation that, as a community, they would be able to do it themselves? At the same time, if the community ‘endeavour’ was preserving something, what was it? What made it possible to continue working collectively on these endeavours?

I was fortunate enough to be able to speak with older relatives of friends about their experiences of the hacienda before Agrarian Reform. There emerged a sense of rupture around that era, and those who had lived through it described events in often mythic tones. One family declined my request to speak to their grandfather, who had worked on the hacienda himself. This revealed a more hidden aspect of the very visible conflict between families in San Isidro. Whilst there was a case in the courts, some people feared that their words could be documented and appear later as someone else’s evidence somewhere. This in turn sparked another route of investigation through the broad theme that had brought me here – the dynamics of cooperation. With these internal conflicts, what was being disputed, and by who? How were conflicts resolved? Who mediated and on what terms?

Community assembly meetings took place at least once a month – usually twice that due to decisions having to be made regarding the pipeline and its management. I made audio recordings of many meetings, and of interviews I conducted toward the end of my time in San Isidro, with people I knew particularly well, to collect life histories from older members of the community, with members of the *directiva*, and more informal recorded conversations with anyone who was willing whilst taking a break from working the fields. On market day in Pujilí I’d often go with tía Sandra, or tía Yulisa¹³ as they traded *cuy* or *capulí* fruit, or just stocked up with groceries for

¹³ Throughout the thesis I have adopted the names, and terms of address, that I used in person. Thus, adult residents are ‘[Señora] Sra ____’ and ‘Don____,’ with the only exceptions being particularly close

the coming week. On any journey to or from Pujilí you would usually encounter someone to chat to, either on the bus, or walking back up the dusty track to San Isidro. I met others through working in people's plots, in the *páramo*, at every *minga* that took place whilst I was there; by attending all the community *asamblea* meetings, as well as planning meetings held by the *directiva*; going with friends to the festivities and *lidia*/bullfighting held in nearby communities; drinking in the shop in San Isidro with people (sometimes a mix of people after a meeting, or with folk returned from a week in the *páramo*, or young men returned home *for* a week).

III. San Isidro

Members of the *comunidad* were either born in San Isidro, born to a family who lived there, or were living in the community by virtue of owning land – in theory, anyone who benefited from the existence of the community in any way, who agreed to participate in communal affairs and was 'approved' by the *asamblea*, could become a *compañero*. In practice, all of San Isidro's 92 households and their 429 residents (at the time of fieldwork) were linked to the community through family relations.

Most families had three children or more, and the majority of households were centred around a married couple, living in a house on land they had inherited or (more rarely) purchased. In cases where both spouses were from San Isidro, only one name would be registered as a *compañero* (for official purposes, eg. voting in elections), and this was usually the name of whoever had initially owned or inherited the land where their family now lived. When a couple got married, a new homestead was built or established – either adding a new building to an existing compound

friends such as Porfirio and Rocío, Myriam and Milton – and then *jovenes* are also referred to in the text just by their given name (surnames are included in case of the need for clarification – though first names, and nicknames, were usually sufficient). "Tía" translates as "auntie" and, as such, I used it (and corresponding masculine form "tío") when addressing siblings of either of my 'adopted parents' (Porfirio and Rocío) – I limit my use of these terms to these particular people, though. "Tía/tío" was also used by many people, especially *jovenes*, to offer respect (and a degree of affection) toward more distant relatives or older members of the community.

close to their parents' home or, more likely, on a plot of land carved out from that belonging to their parents (if still alive) or inherited from them (if deceased). For couples whose families were both from San Isidro, the preferred plot would be the one most suitable for building on, and the other kept as farmland¹⁴ (even if it were at some distance from their new home). Men and women both performed agricultural work, but most men travelled away for paid employment, and in practice the vast majority of planting, harvesting, daily milking, collecting firewood, cooking and child-care constituted *la carga (o sobrecarga) de trabajo a la mujer* (the burden, or overburdening, of work for women).

no. Migrants			% of San migrants	Migration destination	Type of Work	Average Salary / month (US\$*)
	Men (91.9%)	Women (8.1%)				
46	46	-	62.1	Amazon	<i>Petroleros</i> : Un/Skilled	350/550
3	3	-	4.1	Quito	Police	600
9	9	-	12.2	Pichincha	Military	600
8	8	-	10.8	Cotopaxi, Quito, Guayaquil	Construction/Labourer	280
4	1	3	5.4	Cotopaxi	Teacher	330
2	-	2	2.7	Cotopaxi	Domestic Worker	240
2	1	1	2.7	Cotopaxi	NGO/Public Sector	420

Table 1 – Labour Migration from San Isidro (data from 2011)

* Since the year 2000, Ecuador's national currency has been the US Dollar.

Households were often home to three or four generations of the same family. Of the 92 households in the census, six belonged to elderly people – more usually couples, since a single grandparent would normally live with the family of one of their children (typically in a separate building, though sharing space for cooking and eating together). Someone with a child or children of their own might also live with their parents, if they were not married (married couples always had their own home),

¹⁴ For example, tía Virginia and Don Kleber lived with their three children on land Don Kleber had inherited, and they had built their house there upon getting married. By contrast, tía Elvia was also married to someone whose family were from San Isidro (Don Leonel), and with their three children lived on a plot she had inherited – and enlarged through purchase – from her father, and it was her name that was on the register. Both families had more than one plot of land that they farmed.

or until they could afford to live elsewhere. There were ten single-parent families, and their access to land and accommodation was similar to that for married couples. Tía Yulisa (Fig.2), for example, lived with her three children on a plot carved out of the land that still belonged to her aged father, adjacent to the plots of two of her siblings and their families.



Figure 2 – tía Yulisa (centre) bargains to make a sale on her rabbit at the weekly Sunday market in Pujilí.

The economic arrangement of the remaining 76 households was marked by labour migration, usually men (68 of 74 people travelling away for work, from 66 households, v. Table 1). The majority involved work in the oil industry in Ecuador's Amazon regions: 39 – more than half – had at least one person employed in this line of work, a total of 46 people. Three men worked away as policemen (in Quito), and three women and one man were employed as teachers¹⁵. Some households had more

¹⁵ This was tío Leonel. All four were teachers at secondary schools (*colegio*). This included Jenny Guamán, who taught in a special programme in Zumbahua scheduled for weekends, to enable youngsters to work on their landholdings during the week whilst continuing some form of secondary

than one member engaged in labour migration, and not just those in the oil industry. Nine families had a son – it was always someone of the younger generation – in the military. Other jobs were as domestic workers (two women), with an NGO or in the public sector (one woman, one man), and as construction workers or labourers (the remaining eight men: v. Table 1). 10 households (not included in this table) had members who travelled away for work but who did so more locally and sporadically, without a permanent or regular job (having either been made redundant, or being engaged in sporadic work within the region, usually as labourers or unskilled construction workers). The majority of contracts for workers in the oil industry rotated through two weeks at work, followed by one week at home. Men with their own families would work with their families during this week at home, and catch up with friends. Younger, unmarried men would also take the opportunity to socialise and visit friends.

Landholdings, Crops and Conditions

The average amount of land per household was around 1 hectare (2.47 acres or 10,000m²), and the average plot size was just over half a hectare. Landholdings varied in size greatly, however, as did the extension of individual plots. Most households had more than one plot of land, the main one being where the house had been built – usually with enough land to grow some staple crops. Located at the *estribaciones*/foothills of the Western *cordillera*, the average altitude of San Isidro is 2950m above sea level. The Andean climate is dry, and relatively stable year-round, with rainfall concentrated around the months of October and March. Frosts were rare, but crops were also at seasonal risk from inclement weather including hailstorms and strong winds. If space, soil quality and conditions allowed, any or all of these common crops would be grown close to the house: carrots, onions, beetroot, lettuce, maize, barley, wheat, quinoa, numerous varieties of *frejoles*/beans and *papas*/potatoes, and also fruits of various kinds including *taxo* [papaya] trees, and

education. Marisol Allauca (who had a young daughter, Tamia, and lived with her parents tío Raúl and Sra Rosa) worked in the small town of Planchaloma, a couple of hours away by bus, and would make the journey every day. Facing a similar commute was Sra Luz's daughter, Mónica Simaluisa, who taught in Yacubamba – the only community-member of OPIJJ to have its own *colegio*.

mora [blackberries] bushes. Most households had hutches to keep perhaps a dozen *cuy*, and some had built separate outhouses to keep more of them (20-50). Larger animals (most commonly pigs, often also a cow for milk, and a few kept a handful of sheep) would be kept further from the house, perhaps on a separate plot.

Second or third plots of land could be located elsewhere in the village – including inherited plots, and areas purchased or rented from former residents. The higher, and steeper, the land, the more likely it would be used for growing grass or *alfalfa* as fodder for *cuy*. Some plots were located slightly further afield, as for example in cases where land had been purchased from neighbouring communities (a couple of households had access to large areas of poor quality land located up above San Isidro, towards the community of La Playa).

The case of the family I lived with during fieldwork provides an illustrative example of the shrinking landholdings that many families faced, particularly as a result of partible inheritance practices. Don Ubaldino, now in his eighties, had received land deeds in 1967 following the Agrarian Reform law of 1964. The transfer documents gave the area (one hectare). It also stated, *en su condición de exhuasipunguero y adquirente de dicho huasipungo* – declaring that Don Ubaldino was in the position of being a former *huasipunguero*, and also the ‘acquirer’ of the *huasipungo* (plot of land) in question. He was set to be freed from direct labour-obligations, no longer bound to working on the *hacienda*, and was to become the titled owner of a small area of land on which he and his family had been living and working all his adult life. In 2011, this small area of land was home to the families of four of Don Ubaldino’s children.

Don Manuel Guamán had also witnessed these changes in land-use and land ownership over his lifetime in San Isidro. He had been a teenager at the time of Agrarian Reform and now lived with his wife on land inherited from his father. His son, Don Gonzalo lived with his wife, Sra Juana and their nine children on an adjacent plot. Don Manuel told me, “before, we used to have 2 hectares – that was our family plot. But now, the children need somewhere to live. Before, 2 hectares –

and now, just bits and pieces (*pedacitos*), scraps of land, here and there – *pedacitos, no más*.” His experience was far from unique and, as detailed further in Chapter 2, this shortage of land available for personal landholdings meant that the use of communally-held land became more important – and disputed – than ever. Further tensions surrounding land boundaries are also explored in Chapter 5. I turn now, though, to religious practice in San Isidro, and briefly outline its links to indigenous institutions elsewhere in the country.

Religion

The *capilla*/chapel in San Isidro had never been home to a regular priest, and was only used for ‘occasions’: with suitable planning, a priest could be contacted, a baptism arranged and held in San Isidro itself (which meant a shorter walk from the chapel to the family home of the child being baptised, for a party to which everyone would be invited). I only knew one family who went to mass every Sunday, in Pujilí – mainly because Sundays were market day in Pujilí, and the opportunity to trade with people flocking from all over the region was too important to miss for most people. In Yacubamba, there was a growing evangelical church, but in San Isidro everyone was catholic – though some were more dutiful about their religious practice than others. Even if people did not attend church regularly, they would have their children baptised at a young age (whilst some families would delay this, often for financial reasons – the cost of hosting a large party had become prohibitive, with a band to hire, and food to prepare and provide for maybe 200 people). First Communion took place in the church down the road, in the community of La Merced, and on other important occasions, those who wanted to would travel to Pujilí (on Palm Sunday, for example).

Religious practice in San Isidro, then, was informal. For *la Santa Ceniza* (Ash Wednesday), tío Leonel – who had keys to the chapel, and no formal religious training – led a short service in which we sang psalms, and he offered a brief sermon on the need for conscientiousness in *amistad*/friendship. Three *jovenes* (who led the *catecismo*/catechism classes, below) daubed our foreheads with ashen crosses, the

Lord's Prayer was intoned, and we left. Don Rocendo (who I first got to know during a week of work in the *páramo*: Chapter 2) was not in attendance, and later expressed his hesitation regarding formal religion: "God is not only in churches, God is in us... in our houses. We don't need a priest in San Isidro... God is in our house." Sra Nancy, who ran the main village shop, also had a key to the chapel. She would lend it to her daughter Josselyn who led the *catequistas*, or use it to borrow some pews if more seating was required in a community meeting (in the *casa comunal* next door).

Though there were no regular services, weekly unsupervised *catecismo* sessions did take place in the chapel. During one *asamblea* (community assembly meeting), whilst discussing recent disruption to the usual flow of the pipeline which had been due to the negligence of some (unidentified) members who had been assigned to work on maintenance for a week, Porfirio thought there were some younger community residents who had missed out on the practical training that folk of his generation had enjoyed whilst growing up. Not only had groups for the *jovenes* (young people, roughly coinciding with the age of secondary education, 11-18 years old) been inactive of late, but he also thought things had changed, for the worse, with the *catecismo*.

Once a week, children who had not yet been confirmed would attend one of four groups for their age range, and spend up to an hour in preparation for their Confirmation – the younger groups rote-learning prayers, the older groups reading from the bible. Porfirio said the *catecismo* used to be 'practical,' with participants encouraged to plant and harvest, tending a small patch of land beside the chapel, but not anymore. Three of the four groups were led by teenagers who themselves had not long been confirmed. Only Marisol was a bit older, now expecting her first child, and added to the regime of prayer-learning with short talks, encouraging the youngsters to be whatever they wanted to be in life. Older people would happily discuss praying and their 'faith' without attending church, whilst the few teenagers and younger people who openly discussed religion more commonly referred to Nature and the gifts of *Pachamama* (v. Chapter 7). Iván, then 18, had abandoned his brief encounter with the Church: "Did you know I went to seminary school? I was deciding what I

wanted to do with my life: after college I wasn't sure. But I didn't want to become a priest, it turned out..."

Religious practice in San Isidro also reflected ties between some residents and Catholic organisations. When the new *casa comunal* had been finished in 1996, the San Isidro chapel had been decorated on the outside with four colourful images, which Tannia Rojas (who had helped paint them) described as *precolombino*/pre-Columbian: a condor, a moon figure, the face of the sun, and a *danzante* (ritual dancer featured in festivals throughout the region). Inside, the decorations were unique. Inspired by the work of Monseñor Proaño in Chimborazo province, Porfirio had spent a couple of years in seminary training. Though he did not complete the course, he had met many people in the Church, including members of Proaño's foundation FPIE, and many engaged in the transformations brought about by *teología de la liberación* (Liberation Theology) in Ecuador. With the help of a priest attached to FPIE, and with the support of the community, on the wall behind the altar, on which a small crucifix was hung, there was painted a distinct mural – 'one of very few examples in the country' Porfirio emphasised for me. A large *wipala* (Andean motif in rainbow colours) design in the shape of the four-elements cross (*Cruz del Sol* or *Chakana* in Kichwa). Next to it are painted various slogans such as 'humanity and solidarity,' 'goodwill and hard work,' and 'reciprocity-community' – augmented by fruit, maize and celestial bodies (Fig.3, below). These connections and influences are described further in Chapter 7. In the following section, by contrast, I explore influential moments, shifts and processes in the history of San Isidro, and of the surrounding region.

IV. History

“A theory of practice is a theory of history. It is a theory of how social beings, with their diverse motives and their diverse intentions, make and transform the world in which they live... Why does a given society have a particular form at a particular moment – that form and not some other? And how do people whose very selves are part of that social form nonetheless transform themselves and their society?” (Ortner 1989: 193).

Empire, Resettlement and the Hacienda

“We’re talking 800, or 1000 years ago – before the *conquista*/conquest of the Incas – the *etapa*/era of people originally from here (*los pueblos propios de aquí*) – working, developing as they wanted (*desarrollar como ellos querían*). And then, a *fracaso*/setback for them: the imposition of the vision of the Incas. Perhaps it wasn’t so different, but it was an empire, and everyone had to speak Quichua, and forget all the original languages from here. My surname, for example, it’s from Peru – I’m not even from here originally – the Incas brought people here, to be near Quito. The capital then, the capital now! ... They say that in this region, the Incas were only here for forty years (*en esta zona se habla en la historia de que estuvieron solo 40 años en proceso de conquista*) – and that it was a conquest using various, *acertada*/appropriate strategies, to avoid force (*diferente estrategias para no utilizar la fuerza*)... But then – the Spanish conquest – that was a disaster in every sense of the word (*fue un desastre en todo sentido*).”

The history of San Isidro is bound with regional histories of empire and colonial violence – and Porfirio’s brief account of life in the region before the Spanish invasion is echoed in historical works: the relatively short life of the Inca Empire and its practices, the introduction of the Quichua language, and long-distance migration. It is important to note here the role of pre-Inca chiefdoms in shaping not only these changes, but also in the development of the *hacienda* system which has for so long dominated life and history in San Isidro.

Before the Inca state incorporated what is now Ecuador in the late fifteenth century, ‘northern Andean peoples were organized into small-scale, local chiefdoms – highly stratified, nonstate societies with hereditary leadership’ (Lyons 2006: 36). These ‘decentralized and autonomous ethnic chiefdoms’ (Korovkin 2001: 39-40) made Inca influence much less pronounced than in areas of the Andes found today in Peru. Inca rule in Ecuadorian regions has been estimated as lasting for only thirty to forty years (Salomon 1986: 146), but within that time, resettlement was widespread. The Incas ‘brought people from what is now Peru and Bolivia to Ecuador, and vice versa’ – the Chimbo region to the south of Pujilí, for example, received ‘substantial contingents of settlers from the south’ (Espinoza Soriano 1988: 170-176, at Lyons 2006: 38).

The Inca state, like Andean chiefs, demanded labour from its subjects, but also provided for the basic needs of its labourers – this system helped ensure local subsistence whilst the state expropriated a surplus, which meant that redistribution ‘remained the basis of authority’ (Wachtel 1977, Murra 1978, at Lyons 2006: 38). The reach of that authority varied across the empire. Some areas of the central highlands of Ecuador – such as Zumbagua, now the neighbouring parish to Pujilí – are thought to have never been fully controlled by officers of the Inca Empire (Weismantel 1988: 60). San Isidro, however, occupied a more accessible location – closer to trade routes and centres of population such as Latacunga (Salomon 1986: 147, 163).

The “disaster” of the Spanish conquest, as Porfirio described it, took effect locally through the history of the *hacienda* at San Isidro, and its (ongoing) impact on people living there. The development of the *hacienda* economy itself stemmed from relations between ‘the Spanish Crown; the local colonial elite; indigenous chiefs (whose domains had been aggregated into larger units under the Inca state); and indigenous commoners’ (Lyons 2006: 38). The Crown depended on the local colonial elite (Spanish settlers and their descendants) to suppress native uprisings and to send tribute to Spain, which led to competition for the greater amount of control of indigenous labour and the wealth produced (Lyons 2006: 39). Indigenous communities faced exploitation on all three fronts, though could find some room to

manoeuvre among the competing interests of each, by forming strategic alliances or taking advantage of the competition for labour between Spanish landowners (Lyons 2006: 40).

However, as the various forms of compromise between different interests grew more strained by the end of the sixteenth century, the hacienda system became established across the region – these were estates run directly by members of the colonial elite, and populated by indigenous workers bound under debt-peonage (Lyons 2006: 39-43). Many native Andeans had previously fled to urban centres or more remote areas to avoid the increasingly heavy demands of Spanish tribute. Systems of tribute continued into the 19th Century, and early haciendas offered indigenous people a degree of shelter from these demands, and also from mistreatment at the hands of civil and ecclesiastical authorities – though in exchange for their labour. Indigenous populations often ‘actively negotiated the terms of their subordination’ on *hacienda* estates, and ‘fled or protested’ against abusive treatment (Lyons 2006: 35, 44). Indigenous participation in these shifts meant that though they were systematically disempowered, their influence was significant, and the process of becoming permanent resident labourers on *haciendas* was enacted through “a combination of coercion and choice, fraud and negotiation” (Lyons 2006: 44).

The earliest document found in the Provincial Archive in Latacunga referring to *Hacienda Juigua Grande* (later divided into three plots, one of which was *Hacienda San Isidro*) is dated 1606¹⁶ – a census document naming the then landowner as Magdalena Hernández, widow of Joan Gómez de Borja. By 1697, *Hacienda Juigua Grande* had changed hands a number of times, and had even acquired a reputation for its rich soil and output of sheep’s wool (OPIJJ 2009¹⁷: 53). There followed further transactions and exchanges. Though the *hacienda* had been traded and administered as a single unit, after its division into three separate plots in 1778, the day-to-day

¹⁶ Due to the lack of a mining economy, the *hacienda* system was “consolidated much earlier in Ecuador than in Peru or Bolivia, dominating the highland landscape in the seventeenth century and employing more than two-thirds of the indigenous population (Ramón Valarezo 1993: 21)” (Pallares 2002: 10).

¹⁷ This is a book published by OPIJJ on local history, key events in the past of some of its 15 member-communities, and the work of OPIJJ itself – the book compiles interviews, life stories, documentary and archival research, as well as census data.

management of the estate would have been the responsibility of three separate *arrendatarios*/tenant-landlords. The three plots of *Hacienda Juigua Grande* became *Juigua Grande* (an area including today's communities of Yacubamba, Yanahurco, Rayoloma and satellites); *Juigua Pequeña* (now San Antonio); and *Juigua San Isidro*.

There was a period of proprietorship under José Pío Escudero, a politician of some repute who managed *Hacienda Juigua* till his death in 1852. Tax and census records in the National Archive have "Pío Escudero" as the "*propietario de la hacienda 'Juigua' y sus anexas*" in 1848 and 1850 (Archivo Nacional n.d. 26, Caja #103: 303; #104: 309). José Pío Escudero counted none other than Simón Bolívar among his acquaintances, hosting him at his home in Latacunga in 1826 (Jurado Noboa 2010: 308; 1991: 230), shortly before Ecuador's independence from Gran Colombia in 1830. The reputation of *Hacienda Juigua Grande* was again documented in 1853, praised for its artisanal production of cloth, ironwork and carpentry (OPIJJ 2009: 56). This was only a few years before the status of *haciendas* was to change significantly.

In 1857, the *tributo de indios* system was formally abolished (Yashar 2005: 91; Porras 2005). The landed elite – and tenant-landlords of individual *haciendas* – were then directly responsible for systems of *concertaje*, *huasipungo*, and *yanapa*, whereby indigenous peasants worked for landlords in exchange for land use: arrangements typified by abuse and often a 'lifetime of indebtedness to the landowner' (Yashar 2005: 91). For the majority of indigenous people in the highlands, these arrangements were to remain in place till 1937. For communities, like San Isidro, bound to a *hacienda* in the *huasipungo* system, these arrangements would not be overturned until the 1960s.

Faced with increasing rural unrest (especially in the highlands) in the 1930s, the military-controlled state introduced the 1937 *Ley de Organización de Regimen de Comunas* (*Ley de Comunas* / Law of The Communes) (Lucero 2003: 28; Becker 1999). This was to draw a 'clear line of authority' between the national government and rural populations, seeking to 'modernize' them by creating 'new efficient,

productive cooperatives’ (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 17) – effectively to ‘standardize local organization’ and to ‘make Indians into Ecuadorian peasants’ (Yashar 2005: 88). It gave many communities a basis for collective organizing, and secured areas of communal land¹⁸ (Lyons 2006: 289; Korovkin 1997). This legislation, however, did not have universal impact.

The 1937 Law recognized and established the legal standing of many highland indigenous communities, and yet excluded *haciendas* and their ‘sizable indigenous labor force’ (Lucero 2003: 26). Thus the *huasipungo* system of ‘ethnic administration’ was not finally abolished until Agrarian Reform measures in the 1960s (Lucero 2003: 26), which was when most communities legally ‘came into existence’ (Zamosc 1994: 54). Indeed, until Agrarian Reform in 1964, the registered landowners of *Hacienda San Isidro*, along with most of the Alpamalag valley, were *Las Madres Agustinas de la Encarnación* (a sect of Augustinian nuns, part of a Catholic monastic order based in the San Juan area of Quito). Their name appeared on land Deeds granted to San Isidro worker-residents, and it was this group who, in 1967, sold the remaining hacienda lands to the then tenant-landlord, Sr Cornelio Gallegos (whose son still owns and farms the lands today). Despite these continuities, by the end of the 1960s, San Isidro residents had received legal title to their own individual *huasipungo* (plot of land), and the explicit power of the *hacienda* had been formally dissolved.

Crucially, the legal formation of indigenous communities had ramifications beyond the radical shift in modes of authority and control. Within these ‘enclaves of autonomy,’ the idea of community and its ‘survival and reproduction’ led to the reframing of indigenous struggles for ‘a shared space for cultural reproduction’ (Pallares 1997: 144-5, at Yashar 2005: 97; Krupa 2009; Crain 1988). State-endorsed entities began to use their status and collective resources as *communities* to push for more rights, to access more resources, and to further build a national Indigenous Movement with increased political participation (Turner 1993) – community action

¹⁸ For example, Comuna Tola Chica (where I had lived previously, near Tumbaco) was first registered as a *comuna* as early as December 1944.

thus became a form of ‘vernacular statecraft’ (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Lazar 2008: 23). However, even after the end of the formal hacienda system and the granting of Title Deeds to plots of land for its residents, due to internal conflicts and delays to acquiring legal recognition, processes of community-building and community organizing in San Isidro followed their own path.

San Isidro and Registration

Sra Senovia (given her full name, María Ercilia Senovia Caisaluisa Toapanta, on her *Cedula* ID card, which is printed with the word “*analfabeta*/illiterate” in place of a signature) was born in 1934¹⁹. She lived in the nearest house to ours, just down the hill. It was one of the last homes with adobe walls and a *paja*/thatched roof still used in San Isidro. They had nearly all been levelled by the 1996 earthquake, and no one had wanted to take the risk of their house collapsing again. Most people opted to rebuild with the standard supplies of breeze blocks and corrugated roofing. Sra Senovia was Myriam’s [community vice-president] maternal grandmother.

In her old age, her memory was fading, but she clearly recalled the struggle against the hacienda, and the era of “IERAC” in the 1960s. “Then, it was hard. We didn’t have land, no one did... after IERAC [the passing of the Agrarian Reform Law in 1964], that’s when things changed. We changed them. It was a struggle – fighting, fighting, fighting. Working, working, working...” She inched over to a dusty cabinet in the corner of the room, and handed me a picture of her late husband, Isidro Allauca, who had been fifteen years her senior. It was the same portrait that, enlarged and framed, had been hung to one side of the altar in San Isidro’s small chapel (Fig.3). Along with Don Aparicio Copara, he famously led the ‘struggle’ against the hacienda, and died just a few years later in 1973. The community’s primary school

¹⁹ Most people of her generation had received no formal education. Don Ubaldino recalled his parents speaking Kichwa, but only a few senior residents (and those who had chosen to learn since) in San Isidro spoke any Kichwa today. The primary school was technically Kichwa-Spanish bilingual, but a lack of Kichwa teachers meant that this language provision was absent from schooling. A few teenagers had learned enough from school, *colegio* (high school) or family members to follow the gist of Kichwa conversations, but they were very much the exception. This contrasted with the situation in other OPIJJ communities, such as Yacubamba where community meetings were held in Kichwa. In San Isidro, I only ever heard people speaking Spanish.

was named after him. Sra Senovia described their ‘sacrifice’ and years of hardship, working for the hacienda, and praised the bravery and courage of all who were involved (*que valor, que coraje*).



Figure 3 – Interior of the chapel in San Isidro, with the FPIE-sponsored *wipala* mural behind the altar, and black-and-white portrait photograph of Isidro Allauca to the left of the frame.

The 1937 Law had not extended to benefit those living under the hacienda system, but even after Agrarian Reform in 1964, San Isidro did not register as a *comuna*. Former residents of the hacienda *Juigua Grande* had, by contrast, registered as a *comuna* (called *Jatun Juigua Yacubamba*, now the largest community-member of OPIJJ) soon after Reform – as early as November 1966. The ‘fight’ in San Isidro had been successful, but had not brought unity, and some divisions were insurmountable. Some said that there simply hadn’t been sufficient numbers to register at the time (50 families) – others, that a lack of communal land had been the issue. Officially, any settlement of 50 or more *individuals* was encouraged to form a *comuna*, to be led by a *cabildo* (community council) and be registered with the *Ministerio de Bienestar Social* (Ministry of Social Welfare) (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 17; Yashar 2005: 89) – which means there were enough people in San Isidro at the time to form a *comuna*.

There had been other hurdles – one of which was the issue of communal land.

The *huasipungo* plots households received during Agrarian Reform were typically small plots – often just 1 or 2 hectares. The only area of communally-held land granted to residents of San Isidro had been an area of moorland located 20km away: rough pasture land (the *páramo* – v. Chapter 2). Only a very small piece had been set aside for communal use in the village itself – an area just big enough for the chapel and a small *casa comunal* (communal meeting-house) to be built on (between 1967 and 1970), right on the edge of what remained hacienda lands.

The lack of shared land was one hurdle to registration as a *comuna*. More problematic, however, were persistent conflicts and divisions. Even after Reform, a number of families continued to work as (poorly) paid labourers on the hacienda – those unable to travel away to work had little choice, since abolishing systems of debt-peonage had not simultaneously created other local employment opportunities (for more on the impact of Reform on labour and labour migration, v. Chapter 4). Some saw organising and registering as a *comuna* as a potential threat to these arrangements, and felt that maintaining ties with the hacienda should not be jeopardised. There were also a couple of families who disputed the communal ownership of the *páramo*, claiming it as their sole inheritance, and who thus refused to become part of a formalised (and legally-recognised) community. Registering as a *comuna* in these conditions was not possible.

The *comuna* was not the only state-sponsored organisational form available to indigenous communities after Agrarian Reform, however. There were three options: “*comunas* (peasant communities that hold some resources in common), *cooperativas* (narrower collectives of peasants using shared land for agricultural enterprises), and *asociaciones* (groups dedicated to shared economic activity or community development)” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 84). A second wave of Agrarian Reform in the 1970s further encouraged indigenous groups to organize around specific rural development projects (or artisan trades, or urban marketplaces) and, moreover, “forming associations—becoming *socios* (partners) rather than *comuneros* (peasant

community members)—did not require shared land holdings and afforded more flexibility” (ibid.). These conditions suited the situation in San Isidro, and on the 5th October 1976 registration was completed with the Ministry of Social Welfare for *la Asociación de Trabajadores Agrícolas de San Isidro* (“Association of Agricultural Workers of San Isidro”).

It was as this *Asociación* that San Isidro initiated a number of changes: working to receive a mains electricity supply (1987); getting support from the NGO *Visión Mundial* to install a drinking-water supply (shared with Cochaloma, completed in 1990); campaigning Pujilí Municipal Council for assistance in the acquisition of two plots of land from the hacienda-owner, Sr Gallegos (which were where a larger *casa comunal* and sports pitch were then built, 1989-1990); pressing state authorities for education provisions (the primary school opened in October 1993); signing-up as one of 15 community-members of OPIJJ (formerly UOPICJJ when it was first registered in 2000)²⁰; then, more recently, being successful in a third application for state-funding for an irrigation-water project to boost family-scale agricultural production (funding secured 2008, work completed 2010); legally registering as a *comunidad* with CODENPE (2009).

There are a number of things to note here. First, we see that many of the earlier projects and campaigns were to secure basic amenities – water, sanitation, education – that might appear to be ‘rights’ that the State had a responsibility to provide, whether people organised and pushed for their delivery or not. However, a lack of access to these amenities persists in areas of Cotopaxi province (Flores 2009; Ruíz 2009; World Bank 2012). There was little hope in waiting for the State to fulfil any such duties. Rocío once reacted quickly to me describing life in a place where relatively few people were part of a coordinated group, pushing for certain demands: “Oh, it’s vital here... without it, we’d have nothing. No water – no drinking water, no water for irrigation – nothing from the government... If we don’t work as a community, it’s like they don’t see us. To get any support from the government you have to be a community, have to work as a community...” Related to this, the time-

²⁰ v. Appendix 3 for a table charting NGO and governmental support received in San Isidro.

scale of these events is also striking. Events cluster around 1990, 2000, and 2008 – all moments where the Indigenous Movement were particularly influential in national politics – a relationship I come back to below (and explore further in Chapter 6).

It is also revealing that San Isidro was not registered as a *comunidad* until 2009 – reflecting changes to the national Constitution in 2008, which had been influenced by the Indigenous Movement (Becker 2011b). These early years of the Correa government also saw the formation of INAR (the National Institute for Irrigation, in 2007) and a subsequent increase in the availability of funding for irrigation projects. The two shifts coincided in what was happening in San Isidro. Now that the *páramo* was an integral part – the source – of the irrigation project, it was more important than ever to protect ownership of it (which was still disputed). Registering with CODENPE as a *comunidad* offered more protection (than as an *asociación*), under Article #57 of the 2008 Constitution. This details 21 rights for indigenous communities, including protection for lands used in common – which previously had been hard to secure, unless as a *comuna*. Even though membership of OPIIJ (and through that, allegiance with MICC) would normally have provided access to legal support (v. Chapters 5 & 6), it was hoped that, as a *comunidad*, San Isidro would be better equipped to face any further land disputes. It also represented the growing support for communal work and projects that the promise of the pipeline had brought.

V. The Indigenous Movement

As we have seen, periods of intense activity within the national Indigenous Movement of Ecuador correspond with some significant changes in San Isidro. Here I wish to elaborate further on: (i) its influence on localised action and in shaping national politics; (ii) what the Movement has revealed about analytical approaches used to understand its actions and ways of doing politics.

Ecuador is said to host Latin America's 'strongest Indigenous Movement,' fronted by CONAIE, which was formed in 1986 from previous organisations of indigenous nationalities from the Sierra and Amazonia (Yashar 2005: 85). This was just two years before graffiti reading "*500 años de resistencia*" began appearing across Ecuador, in opposition to the celebrations planned to mark the quincentennial of Columbus' arrival in the Americas dated to 12th October 1492 (Meisch 1992: 55; Martínez Novo 2009: 2; Lucas 2000). CONAIE came to national and international prominence through the 1990 *levantamiento* (uprising), followed by other mobilizations in 1992, 1994, 1997, 2000, and 2001 (Martínez Novo 2009: 2). It has since debated development policy and influenced the drafting of the 1998 Constitution, and in its "claims to representation of all Indians in the country, it has no counterpart in Latin America" (Yashar 2005: 85, 131).

Bretón (2008: 584) describes the structure of the hierarchized Movement as pyramidal, with 'autonomy for each level and for the organizations that form it:' at the base are communities, cooperatives and associations (such as San Isidro); from these a federation or OSG (*organizaciones de segundo grado*, second-tier organizations) is formed (San Isidro is a member of a local 'union' of fifteen neighbouring indigenous communities, OPIJJ); these in turn collectively form a third tier federation usually operating across a province (OPIJJ is part of MICC in Cotopaxi); MICC is part of one of three main organizations (one from each of the Sierra, the Amazon and the Coast), namely ECUARUNARI, and these three in alliance form CONAIE. Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009: 24) highlights the fact that though the 'structure' may fit a pyramid model, 'power' within the Movement functions through diverse connections, mobilizations and alliances, and thus massed and individual communities can have a direct influence on the visions and future of the Movement as a whole (these dynamics are explored further in Chapter 6).

In examining collective action among indigenous communities in Chimborazo province, Lyons reflects on "peasant responses to the erosion of their traditional prerogatives in periods of market expansion and landlord aggressiveness" (Lyons 2006: 125). In recent history, such responses at the national level have variously

taken the form of direct action, civil disobedience and the uprisings mentioned above – clustered around significant dates from before and after the formation of CONAIE. These include the introduction of the first agrarian reform legislation in 1964 (Handelman 1981: 73; Weismantel 1988: 68); the second agrarian reform law in 1973 (Becker 2008: 142); and, more recently, the May 1994 Agrarian Development Law (Sawyer 2004: 208), and the push to sign the Tratado de Comercio Libre (TLC or Free Trade Treaty) with the United States in 2006 (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 177). Subsequent literature draws two central threads through these mobilizations, theorizing them (i) as a simultaneous source of common struggle among (and reinvented symbolic bonds between) rural populations (Guerrero 1998: 118 at Bretón 2008: 594), and (ii) as reactions to perceived and direct threats to the relations, beliefs and practices that underpin subsistence and smallhold farming (Lyons 2006).

These approaches run the risk, however, of reducing, in too neat a fashion, all peasant political activity or collective organizing to different forms of response or reaction – whereas, as Steve Stern points out, the Andean peasant world is one populated by people who are “continuous initiators in political relations” (Stern 1987: 9). Such was the target of Orin Starn’s *Andeanism* critique (Starn 1994) – a charge laid against scholarly work in the region which discussed highland communities as if they were discrete entities: impermeable, bounded collectivities which were centred (only) around efforts of ‘cultural preservation’ in the face of a dominating wider world. Instead of seeing ‘syncretism and shifting identities’ in ‘dynamic, sometimes ambiguous’ rural communities, Starn’s accusation was that such work ‘downplayed mixture and change’ (Starn 1992a: 155), “overemphasized continuity and isolation” (Orlove 1994: 30), and fed into a “stereotype of Indian societies hermetically sealed, static, and historically doomed” (Salomon 1973: 465, at Starn 1992a: 157).

Social Movements theories, by contrast, sought to understand how social actors – including, eventually, rural communities and peasants – generated ‘visions, symbols and procedures for organizing’ through active processes of ‘construction and creation’ (Escobar 1992: 414; Melucci 1985, 1989; Maffesoli 1996; Diani 1992).

Doing so highlighted the particular interactions that shaped movement activity, locating instances of collective action within the international systems and nation states that are central to the workings of systems of domination (Wright & Nelson 1995: 47). It also drew attention to the contested dynamics of cooperation, whilst analysing those dynamics in context.

Social movements were no longer mistaken as ‘unitary actors devoid of internal contradictions,’ and their existence emerged within (rather than being separate from) ‘the larger social, cultural and political fields’ within which their experiences took shape (Gledhill 2000: 196; Hall & Fenelon 2008). The result was seeing marginalised people’s collective action not exclusively as “the determined product of large structures of domination,” nor defining the actors involved “by a set of ‘essential’ features or by appealing to certain ‘objective’ criteria that would bring to light a preconstituted category” – and, instead, examining the ways in which movement actors “construct their identities and communities through innovation and recombination of elements, through local synthesis and innovation, resistance and accommodation” (Escobar 1992: 414-5; Seligmann 2008: 325). This is to examine why some constructions of community are supported and others rejected or contested, how specific desires are ‘accommodated’ or ‘recombined,’ and the ways in which alternative actions are evaluated. Which is also to examine the creation of different kinds of ethical value, and the tensions that emerge regarding legitimacy, desirability and viability (Lambek 2013: 149; Graeber 2005: 446). To this end, some analytical work has placed questions and considerations of value like these at the centre of analyses of political movements, especially within Latin American settings.

Instrumental, Organisational, Expressive

Wade reviews contemporary social movements throughout Latin America, and identifies a broad trend differing from patterns of protest and collective action of earlier decades, where “there is less of an emphasis on either modernisation or revolution as the basic options, and more on the multiplicity of political spaces that can be carved out in the nation, and the globe, in which ‘politics’ is no longer on a

separate level, but is integral to social life... There is also often less emphasis on the sphere of production (labour versus capital) and more on ‘reproduction’ (for example, of the environment, whether urbanised or rural)” (Wade 2010: 113). Thrown into relief here are questions regarding: how those involved define and understand these ‘options’ and their relationships with them (Warren & Jackson 2003; Holloway 2010); and how these create the desired – and fought for – outcomes of collective action. These, in turn, challenge the means, and meanings, of political action more broadly: given its integral relationship to ongoing practice and everyday life, how is concerted action to be undertaken?

These questions are just as pertinent at the community level. What kinds of action – and what forms of work – do we, as social actors, want to both rely on, and to bring about? Who decides what these are, and how they are to be pursued? What are the value conflicts that arise from such attempts at coordination? What is it to mobilize, not around ‘revolution,’ but as part of “dynamic counter-ideologies and social movements that seek to spark recognition of the falsity of hypostatic ideological racist structures” (Whitten & Whitten 2011: 111)?

Such questions (concerning the purpose, design and meaning-making activities of movements) have been asked of indigenous action in Ecuador before now. In a study by Zamosc of the 1990 *Levantamiento Indígena*, we can see the influence of the social movements approach. He sets out to clarify ‘who mobilized, how they did so, and what goals were being pursued’ – which he links to the ‘three coordinates’ of collective action: the *instrumental* (action as directed toward shared goals); the *organizational* (the networking and articulation that make collective action possible); the *expressive* (the form and content of collective action have *denotative value* regarding the social identity of the group in question) (Zamosc 1994: 49, emphasis added; Rucht 1990). This account, however, is limited to exploring a single event, and does not address the ongoing or ‘permanent’ nature of collective action as undertaken by communities such as San Isidro. The key elements of collective action each relate to the questions of value mentioned above: the choices regarding motivations (‘instrumental’), decisions on logistics and alliances (‘organisational’),

and the characteristics of the way-of-life that community-members express a desire for and consider themselves to be supporting (the ‘expressive’). I apply my approach to action and value, detailed above, specifically to localised dynamics in the Indigenous Movement in Chapter 6 – and its use in other chapters is detailed further in the following section.



Figure 4 – Rocío on a plot of land owned by her mother, Sra Zoila (photo by Rocío’s son, Pachacutic Allauca).

VI. Thesis Overview

Chapters 2 and 7 bookend the thesis, and both examine the revaluation of inherited lands and landscapes. Chapter 2 analyses the powerful symbolism of the *páramo* as a site of suffering in the past and of success today, then analyses how these experiences are combined in the demands and practice of physical activity. Chapter 7 echoes this dynamic by examining how acts of celebration surrounding *patrimonio*/patrimony explicitly draw on shared histories in order to reassess the present.

In each chapter, I have chosen to focus on one particular ‘arena’ of action. Each arena generates different kinds of value, and their inter-relationship then frames the chapter. Each gravitates around physical, political, symbolic or celebratory action, but is not limited to a single activity, location or group. Sites where action is focused start in the heart of communal lands, move through different spaces and conflicts (moving as far away as a regional protest campaign), and then return to the community itself.

Chapter 2 begins in the *páramo*, a place where collective action in San Isidro has intensified in scope and scale since the completion, in 2010, of the community’s irrigation pipeline. Through an account of shared work, infrastructure and stories, it shows how collective work on the pipeline project has led to people revaluing the use and significance of communal land, and the viability of community action. Chapter 3 is thematically closely linked to this – the relationships between physical activity, material value, conviviality and ethical value – but focuses on the use of a particular social form of work in San Isidro, the *minga*. Here it is not only the location of action but also its organisation which emerges from inherited concepts and resources. As a particular form of coordinated action, the *minga* is used to both create and represent material value, as well as ethical and experiential values. This highlights the dual role of *mingas* in San Isidro – as both a practical solution (providing necessary productive labour), and as a form of action that generates social values (underscoring the social significance of particular forms of action).

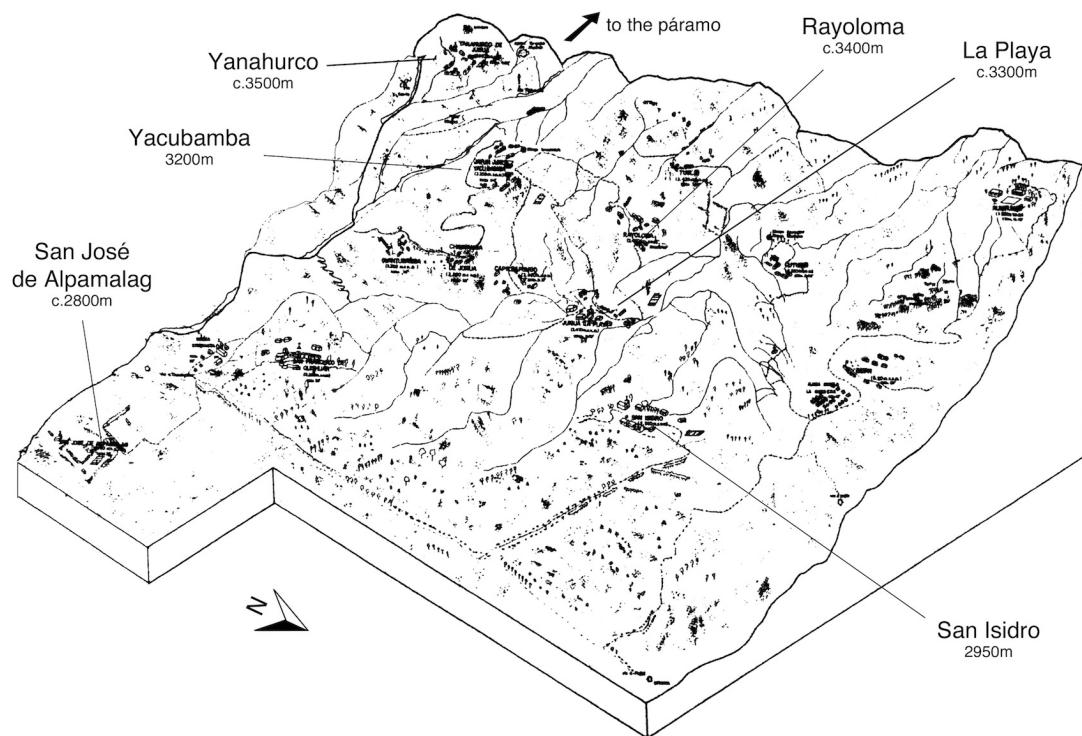
The significance of *mingas* for returning migrant workers is addressed in relation to time and temporality in Chapter 4. The realm of coordinated, intentional action is seen as engaging with, and within, a timeframe that sits between immediate imperatives on one hand, and the unobtainable promise of long-term economic horizons on the other – that of the ‘near future’ (Guyer 2007) – in direct contrast to the experiences of work for migrant labourers. A majority of households in San Isidro are home to someone (usually a man aged 18-55) working for an oil company in Ecuador’s Amazon regions. Crucially, many of these jobs depend on shifts that cycle between two weeks at work followed by one week at home. These regular

spells of absence and presence punctuate the lives of both those who travel, and those who do not. Changes generated by this work contribute to increasing divisions and disparities among San Isidro residents, and only when combined with concerted, collective action ‘at home’ has full use been made of the time, money and resources that increased migration has brought.

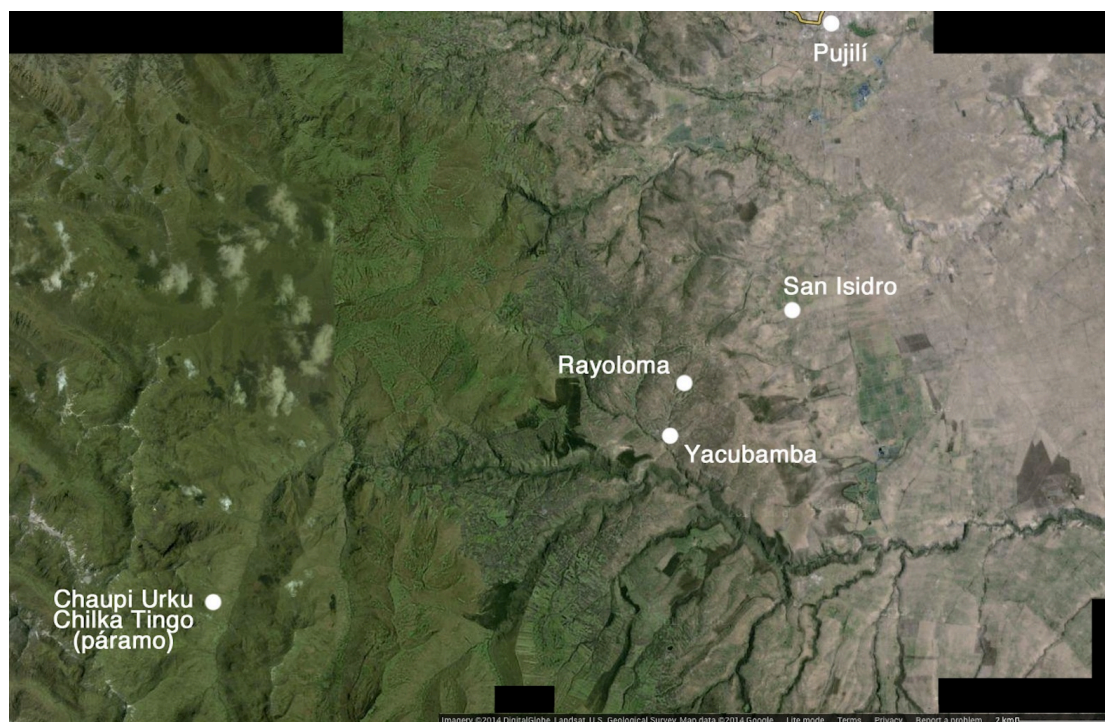
Chapter 5 focuses on a second form of coordinated action which creates values in the sense of both ‘objects’ and ‘consequences’ and, like *mingas*, reaffirms its own significance. The *asamblea comunitaria* (community assembly) is both an organizational ideal and structure, and has been adopted directly from the broader Indigenous Movement. Echoing the analysis of *mingas* in Chapter 2, I argue that the practice of the *asamblea comunitaria* reinforces shared notions of the importance and possibilities of cooperative action.

Chapter 6 relates community action in San Isidro to regional and national contexts of Indigenous political organizing in Ecuador, and looks at the influence of the national Indigenous Movement, and of government policies such as those related to ‘Buen Vivir.’ I focus on a coordinated campaign against local plantations undertaken by an alliance of neighbouring communities. This campaign made particular use of the 2008 National Constitution, and built a legal case around the concept of ‘Buen Vivir,’ working to defend a variety of livelihood practices, and reflecting a diverse gathering of desires and grievances. This parallels the dynamics of collective action within San Isidro itself, where sets of issues (access to land, use of the landscape, access to water, the ability to practice family-scale agriculture) are addressed without first having to establish or achieve unity. I show how ethical value is connected to the uncertainty of collective action. Collaborative work involves conflict, fragility and determination – with uncertain outcomes. Meanwhile, the violence of landowners, the shortage of land, the lack of employment – these things (which communal action sets out to address) seem to be all too tenacious and stable. In Chapter 4, this ‘mismatch’ is examined in relation to other forms of ‘liminality’ and marginalisation. Here in Chapter 6, I explore its significance for the expansion of networks of cooperation and mobilisation.

As noted above, Chapter 7 examines acts of collective celebration and their role in the reaffirmation of values and in remembrance. In recent years, the identification and celebration of *patrimonio*/patrimony have both become increasingly central to community action in San Isidro. Such celebratory events both commemorate past efforts and reaffirm the importance of current activities for those taking part. Rather than reflecting a defensive interest in heritage and preservation as a reaction to external forces, I argue that these coordinated moves to celebrate ‘place’ are better interpreted as actions that counteract dominant, devaluing narratives of modernization, *mestizaje* and development.



Map 2 – Relief map detailing location and approximate altitude of San Isidro and five other community-members of OPIJJ. The San Isidro páramo is located in the hills to the West of Yanahurco (modified by author from source – OPIJJ 2009: 165).



Map 3 – Approximate locations of the San Isidro páramo, nearby villages and Pujilí (modified by author from source: Google maps).

2

The Páramo and *el Sistema*: Legacies of Land Reform and Re-evaluation

Before I ever made the half-day hike from San Isidro up to the páramo, I heard about it almost every day: its beauty, lakes, and the hot springs; deep valleys, rivers and 4500m peaks; its stories; the cold climes and dramatic views; the struggles to own it. This thousand-hectare area of high-altitude moorland, up in the hills above San Isidro itself – its presence was expansive. It appeared in conversations, myths, recounted memories, and within the day-to-day arrangement of tasks and activity.

Somebody might have been preparing to go there and work an allotted week-long shift '*en turno*' (in turn). This would involve tending the community's small herd of alpacas, and carrying out maintenance work on the irrigation water pipeline (usually referred to simply as *el sistema* / the system). Someone else, recently returned from the same, would be urging me to go there soon, just to be amidst the páramo's wonders. Or maybe I'd be hearing opinions about the ongoing legal case, and disputes over communal ownership. Or else I'd be talking to an older member of the community, perhaps Sra Enriqueta, who recalled having to stay up there for weeks on end in her youth, tending a herd of cattle belonging to the *hacienda* owner. Pupils about to leave primary school would draw it, verdant and thriving, as their 'favourite place.' By degrees it was woven as a place of wilderness and history, of the pipeline today and of cattle-herding before now, of work and water, gelid air and mystery: an important place of turmoil and beauty.

The expanse of these rugged peaks and straw-like grasses (*paja*) that belongs to San Isidro covers 1060 hectares, and is known by its Kichwa name, *Chaupi Urku Chilka Tingo*²¹. It is a place where collective action has intensified in scope and scale since the completion in 2010 of the community's irrigation pipeline, which sources water

²¹ Alternative spellings sometimes adopted more Latinised forms: *Chaupi Urco* (*Urcu*) *Chilca Tingo* (*Tingu*).

there from two small rivers. This shared infrastructure project became a central focus of communal life, one which both enables and demands various forms of coordinated work and interaction. The páramo is also a site of significant historical importance. Commemorative acts here remember the landscape as symbolic of victory and solidarity. To mark the inauguration of the pipeline, a plaque was laid at the base of a bare flagpole beside the alpaca corral. Thanking recent ancestors for their efforts in acquiring this land, the plaque legend restates the páramo's role as both site and source of communal action, concluding with the line: *este páramo, fuente de vida, que cuidaremos por siempre y hasta siempre* ('this páramo, wellspring of life, that we will look after forever and ever').

In this chapter, I draw on Lambek's discussion of 'evaluation' (2010a/b) to make sense of how particular forms of action influence people's ideas about the constitution of the community to which they belong, and about the viability of those actions. This is to move beyond identifying and enumerating diverse values (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 167), and instead to examine different possibilities of human action as they emerge in practice (Guyer 2009; Carrithers 2005; Graeber 2008). Echoing Deleuze (1983; 1990)²², in place of itemising isolated accounts of what people describe as 'good' or 'valuable,' this approach analyses the generation and maintenance of different people's tendencies and capacities to value things, whether they do so individually or (perhaps especially) collectively. I first describe the kinds of work and activity that go into the pipeline project, how this is arranged and organised, and the kinds of stories and reflections that these experiences provoke. In the second section, I look at the inter- and intra-community conflicts that stem from the páramo and to what extent these have been addressed, and then I outline the key features of this project that mark it out as distinct from past endeavours. In the third section I relate the differing experiences emerging from these activities to acts of remembrance, and consider how momentous events in the history of San Isidro (such as Land Reform in the 1960s) are now retold through more recent work conducted in these same hills. I suggest that recent processes of collective action undertaken in the

²² "It is worth noting... that Deleuze isn't as interested in the question of "what is good" or "what is valuable" as he is in the capacity of human beings to value things (or, if you like, to "create values")" (Jun 2011: 103)

páramo – different kinds of ongoing activity associated with the pipeline – have led to the ‘re-evaluation’ (Lambek 2010b) of both the páramo itself (as a source of water and as a site of historical significance), and of the work that takes place there.

Overview: Regular Action, Consequences and Transformation

Shared ownership of the páramo was granted to the community in May 1968, following indigenous uprisings and the enactment of Ecuador’s first Land Reform Law. This was an era of momentous change for people in communities such as San Isidro, who for generations had been working in conditions likened to slavery as *huasipungueros* (bound labourers) on privately-owned or managed *hacienda* farms. The Land Reform Law in 1964 declared an end to this system of debt-peonage. Over subsequent decades, an extensive literature²³ has assessed the facts and figures of Land Reform’s proposed, and witnessed, impacts. Some authors point out that the socioeconomic structure of the highlands was not radically altered by Reform (Weismantel 1988: 68), and marked inequalities persisted as before (explored further in Chapter 4). In terms of gaining access to cultivable land, for example, Whitten (1981: 12) describes Reform for bound peasants on private *haciendas* as involving little more than receiving formal title to their ‘traditional meagre holdings.’ Crucially, though, certain communities also received some redistributed land. This was usually of poor quality, at high altitude or inaccessible: landowners kept fertile valley lands for themselves (IRBC 1999: ii). For San Isidro, the land received was this area of high-altitude moorland, and its presence and significance in communal life has expanded through increased activity that both utilises, and takes place in, the páramo.

Until the completion of the pipeline, the páramo was used mainly as wild pastureland by only a small number of people in San Isidro, when many people described the

²³ eg. Barsky 1978, 1984a, 1984b; et al 1982; Borrero 1995; Bretón 2008; Centro de Estudios y Análisis 2002, 2005; Chiriboga 1988; Chiriboga & Rodríguez 1998; Forster 1989; Francescutti 2002; Handelman 1980; Haney & Haney 1984, 1987, 1989; Hurtado 1971; IRBC 1999; Luzuriaga & Zuvekas 1983; Martínez Valle 1987; Velasco 1979; Viteri 2007; World Bank 1972a/b, 1995a/b; Zevallos 1989. This thesis follows Lyons (2006), Latta (2011) and others in their efforts to “humanize the history of the post-land reform era” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 20).

community as being *poco organizada* (poorly organized). More recently, however, members of the 85 families who use water from the pipeline regularly spent time working there, either as part of occasional collective work-parties (*mingas*), or in smaller groups during regular, week-long stints. *Mingas* had been crucial to the pipeline's construction, and had since taken place in the páramo when large-scale maintenance work was required – a handful of times per year up to 100 people would spend a weekend there (see Chapter 3). The *en turno* shifts, taken 'in turn' according to a rota, were more regular, and involved three people from three different member-families living and working together from Sunday to Sunday in an isolated hut built specifically for this project (Fig.5). When three people were there each week, this worked out at roughly two shifts of one week per household, per year.

A series of lists and accounts kept track of who had worked when, and who had paid (and how promptly) their monthly contributions to the ongoing costs of the pipeline. These managerial tasks were administered by members of the community *directiva*, in discussion with regular *asamblea* (assembly) meetings where all members were invited to offer their input to the project. Meetings took place at least once a month, but given the overlap in community membership and pipeline membership (the vast majority of households fitted both categories), even meetings called for other purposes might find a pipeline-related item on their agenda.

Having made their way up to the páramo, the small team of workers was charged with two main responsibilities. One was herding a couple of dozen alpacas out onto the hills to pasture, a different area each day, and bringing them back every evening to the corral, securely enclosed by fencing and a ditch to deter predatory Andean wolves. The other duty, considered the most important, was maintaining the flow of water through the pipeline. A series of tanks, valves and grates had to be checked and monitored, once in the morning and again the evening.

This regular activity had perceptible outcomes, in that it transformed the material utility of the páramo, and delivered resources vital to agriculture to those living in San Isidro. What was in the past a rarely seen or considered area of moorland was

now more widely recognised as a rich source of water. In Arendt's terms, such activity both responded to needs (and thus resembles *labour*) and also mobilized capacities for 'making, fabricating and producing' associated with *work* (Arendt 1958: 236). Such were the forms of 'production' or productive activity associated with the pipeline. However, time spent here also created distinct experiences and stories, both appealing to and instigating notions of collectivity and common purpose. These, in turn, provoked conflicts and divisions.

Taken together, these relational transformations reflect the various 'consequences' of action – the often unpredictable results of acts that only take place intersubjectively and are not possible in isolation (Arendt 1958: 179-194). This chapter examines such 'consequences' and their relation to the ongoing pursuit of collective action in San Isidro. How does regular participation in the project affect those involved? What importance or significance is attached to the experiences that this ongoing action generates? Answers to these questions consider the relationship between 'production' and 'action.' They also query too ready an association of all forms of value with the material, since to do so is to reduce all value to its 'objectified and material or functional dimension' where the 'value of acts is collapsed into the value of productive labor' (Lambek 2013: 154). As Munn notes, intrinsic to processes of value-creation is the "evaluative rendering of the self by significant others" (Munn 1986: 15) which Uzendoski (2004: 899) develops as a definition of 'intersubjectivity'. In this light, examining the relationship between different kinds of value is to avoid formulations of action that are too calculated and mechanistic – and instead to recognise the passion, conflicts, complexities and ambivalence involved in action, interaction, and their consequences (Lambek 2010b: 40).

I. Experiences: Shared Work, Infrastructure and Stories

I turn first to the physical exertion and duties of the pipeline project. Whilst fulfilling an obligation, participants and especially young people reassessed their relationships with the living environment and with each other, and with their links to (and understandings of) the history of the community they lived in. I suggest the pipeline

is a ‘social object’ (Jackson 2005) that both materializes and symbolizes value – the material product of past efforts and ongoing action, and symbolic of the various acts with which it is associated (Lambek 2013: 155). In the retelling of stories, and through regular, cooperative action, work on such a ‘social object’ transforms not only elements of the physical environment, but also ‘intersubjective experience’ (Jackson 2005: 37) – and through such action a ‘community may repair or reverse some of the violent events that have befallen it’ (ibid.). In the case of San Isidro, this involves re-assessing contemporary activity in the light of suffering endured in the past.



Figure 5 – *Chaupi Urku Chilka Tingo*: looking south from the project *casita*/hut (toward the left of the frame) in the San Isidro páramo, with the alpaca corral/shelter in the foreground.

Working *En Turno* and Maintaining *El Sistema*

It was a story I had heard before, how *Rudio Kucha* came into existence. I was hearing it again that particular evening, beside the cooking fire in our hill-station hut, because of our plans for the following day. These plans would involve an extra early start. We would have to be on the move before dawn, after checking the alpacas and taking them to pasture, and after cooking and eating a hearty breakfast, probably

another huge bowl of rice, noodles, sausage and onion. Then we'd have to go and do what is expected of everyone who works here *en turno*: daily checks on the flow of water into the two water-catchment tanks. It would be quite a hike just to reach the tanks, since they're located on two different streams, both further up the valley. They are the start the pipeline, the source of *el sistema*. Sometimes they'd get blocked by debris. At other times, especially after a night of heavy rain, they could overflow. One of the three weekly workers would be sufficiently familiar with the technical operation of the system to control the water-flow, and keep it to around the 50 litres-per-second mark.

These checks would also take us to the white-painted, concrete housings for various stop-taps and air-valves. These were dotted along the pipeline and, as such, their presence marked the route of the pipe, visible sometimes for miles at a time along the valley-sides (v. image in Appendix 5). Between them a dark scoring of the hillside also followed the route – visible traces of the pipeline's construction, and the paths that followed it. These were a reminder of just what a feat of construction *el sistema* was. Mile after mile of piping, buried under ground – most of it about 40cm in diameter and in lengths of 5m or more – and much of it encased in cement. Added to that, the series of regular concrete constructions, and all built in a place accessible only by a footpath – a path often barely just wide enough for a horse or donkey to pass, carrying or dragging the necessary pipes, tools, and bags of sand and cement.

When our assigned duties had been fulfilled and the work of pipeline maintenance completed for the morning, there was time and space in which to enjoy other ways of being in the páramo, new ways of moving through these landscapes, and experiences to be had that were not easy to repeat. We were planning to hike right up to the *cumbre*, the highest summit of the páramo belonging to San Isidro, which would mean tracing almost half the length of its *linderos*/boundaries. A few years ago, a group led by Myriam had done this, in order to confirm the borders with those areas of páramo belonging to neighbouring communities. Patricio (Pato) had been part of that group, and had also made the hike to the *cumbre* again since. Juan-Carlos (16) had never been there. David (18) had only been there once, when he was much

younger, just half that age, tagging along with a group of older *jovenes* in their mid- and early-teenage years. This had been an event coordinated by and for the youth-group known as the “Red Scarves”.

Once a thriving group, meeting and planning regularly, it had gradually stopped functioning, and in 2011 the *jovenes* of San Isidro would still convene and work on organising events and activities, but no longer under the ‘Red Scarves’ name. The original group had introduced many of the younger residents of San Isidro, who were then beginning to take on roles of responsibility in the community, to both the processes of collective organising, and to the experiences of time spent in these hills. Patricio fondly recalled a number of expeditions he’d been part of with the ‘Red Scarves’ – fishing for trout in the páramo streams, travelling en masse to a nature reserve in the lowland canton of La Maná. Now, age 26, he was vice-president of San Isidro.

Our planned hike would take us all day. There at the *cumbre* we would find this magical lake, *Rudio Kucha*. I had first heard the story of its origins retold to me by Pachacutic, who kept close to the version he had heard from his grandmother, Sra Enriqueta. Here in the páramo, with just the four of us present, perched in the dark light beside the fire and chatting after our evening meal of alpaca stew, Patricio took the opportunity for poetic licence, adding some comically lewd elaborations to the more explicit events in the story (which his audience responded to with jokes and jibes).

‘It was said that a long time ago, huge herds of cattle in the páramo had been looked after by a solitary herdsman. This herdsman lived for many years alone with the cattle, without returning home to spend time with his family. In loneliness and solitude, the animals were his only company. Every day, in the afternoon, all the animals would gather at one particular place, a flat, sheltered spot, to rest for the night. Here, where the animals would sleep, there wasn’t much water. Every afternoon, when the animals gathered, the bull would ‘lavish his attention on the cows’ (cue laughter from David and Juan-Carlos). The herdsman would watch, and

himself began to feel lust for the cows ('Disgusting!' 'Ha, look who's talking!'). Time passed, and in his loneliness, the herdsman eventually 'did with the cows what the bull had been doing' ('I bet you would too, you're sick!' "Not me! I bet you're out there with the alpacas whilst we're in here sleeping!') – and from that moment on, that spot where the cows used to sleep turned into a lake, as punishment for what he had done, and all the cattle died, along with the herdsman.' For some, this myth explained the existence of the lake way up in the páramo hills. For others, the moral message was one of reverence, which David duly echoed: 'that's what happens when you don't respect animals'.

In our evening conversation, I had asked David what he liked about working here in the páramo. His moderate reply, "securing water for the community – not much else", seemed slightly at odds. It didn't quite match the energy and light-heartedness with which he set about many of the tasks required (and pass-times afforded) by life in the hills. This could be cutting river banks with a hoe, muddying the waters to assist skilled nets-man Patricio in catching trout downstream; gutting the dozens of fish caught; deftly skinning the alpaca that died that week after a bout of unexplained illness, then salting the meat cut from its carcass ready to dry in the hot sun of the following day; wielding a torch in the night-time sport of catching *tungui* [small finch-like bird] as they slept amidst the thatch roof of the alpaca corral, before plucking it bare and barbecuing it on the open fire. Some nights he'd tell me about Streetfighter arcade games, and where he bought bootleg death metal CDs in the provincial capital, Latacunga. These *en turno* shifts were the result of tightly administered and coordinated work, with the bureaucratic workload falling to members of the *directiva*. At the same time, they were also an opportunity for those involved to become personally acquainted with places that had previously been associated with the past and with 'our ancestors.'

Lugar Pesado: Aparecidos and Ancestors

After Patricio's telling of the *Rudio Kucha* story, David picked up the theme of myths and stories, and told us how the páramo was undeniably a magical place

(*claro, este lugar tiene duende*). Ghosts (*aparecidos*) had appeared to one of his cousins here in the past. They had been an apparently benevolent (at least, not malicious) presence. This was the case with other encounters. His cousin had seen two figures stood on a hilltop, which then suddenly vanished. “Sure, you might see a ghost (*espíritu*), there are spirits here... spirits, and ghosts, they say they exist in the páramo – the ghosts and stories my grandparents have told me about”. The páramo had a ready reputation as a ‘*lugar pesado*’, a place laden, heavy, deep with powers and significance.

On a different trip to the páramo, a couple of months later, I was with Iván Guamán (then aged 18). We had hiked right to the top of the hill behind the alpaca corral, trailing the herd as they pastured. It was a particularly clear day: we were sitting under the piercing blue sky, the flare of the sun directly overhead. Looking south, the bright white, bulbous peak of Volcán Chimborazo stood out undeniably in the distance. We had been watching huge, circling birds of prey. Sometimes more than one at a time would come. They were too distant to be decipherable, though, and Iván doubted those who said they had seen condors here, and bemoaned the loss of those great birds: “It would be... incredible to see a condor here again. But I don’t think it will happen. Our ancestors (*nuestros mayores*) used to kill them – saw them as a ‘plague’ – a plague that would kill calves and lambs. So they are no longer here. Such a shame, such a shame...” The legacy of those *mayores* was reflected not only in the presence and absence of wildlife, however: Iván reminded me that “there are some sinister sites (*sitios malos*) here in the páramo... with ghost, with spirits. The spirits of our ancestors – of the people who used to work here. Not evil, but powerful. They influence us... you can feel it.”

Another week I was there with 22-year-old farmhand and guitarist Hendry Copara. Being in the páramo meant he missed a weekly rehearsal with San Isidro’s “folklorica” band. As if to compensate for this, he elaborated on detailed plans he had for early retirement, an easy life to be lived on the proceeds of the band’s surely-imminent fame and fortune. A life of material plenty furnished with currently unobtainable riches and consumer goods. This didn’t seem to be an absolute priority,

however, or at least would have to be combined with time spent in the páramo.

One afternoon we sat chatting. The alpacas were taken to various spots for pasture, rotating between places to allow the grasses to regrow. Some of the spots were quite a distance from the hut, and so all day might be spent watching over the alpacas, before leading them back to the corral in the afternoon. If the spot were a place where firewood could be gathered, perhaps from the few trees that grew deeper down the valley-sides, closer to streams, then this would be gathered, tied into a bundle, and carried back with us at the end of the day. If not – some of the pasture areas were high up in the hills – then there might be nothing to do but find a bit of shelter among the *paja*, and talk, or admire the views, or huddle under whatever waterproof garments we had brought with us whenever it rained (which was often). In full rhetorical flow, Hendry added with quiet conviction: “This is a beautiful place. The páramo, *our páramo (nuestro propio páramo)*. A special place. I’ll be here, working, on my horse, looking after animals, looking after the páramo and the land... I’ll be here ‘till death. Here... you can cry aloud, you can cry alone, shout out, and no one will hear you... you can feel free here”.

By turns pensive and energetic, different people’s enjoyment of time spent in the páramo was by no means limited to youthful adventures and enthusiasm, however. A lot of folk would share their thoughts and comfort in being here, despite the work and tasks to be done. After a particularly long week – even colder and wetter than average, and with a lot of hiking – the three of us preparing to leave were tidying up the hut and tools, in preparation for the arrival of the next team. This was the week there with Iván, above, and also with Don Norberto Copara, then president of the community. Just before midday, we saw them below, inching along the valley-bottom path: Don Leandro Rojas, Pavel Ronda, and Don Luis Guamán. As they arrived and began to unload sacks of food for the week and bundles of firewood from their three donkeys, Don Leandro went straight to one bag and pulled out a small, clear-plastic bottle, half-filled with clear liquid. Pure cane alcohol (*caña*).

Before we left, we would all have to go through and check the equipment inventory,

and sign the A4 sheets to be taken home with us – these to notify the *directiva* back in San Isidro of any damage to any tools, or to the pipeline itself, which had been caused or encountered during our 7-day stint. Before that, though, we would have a drink. “For your journey” said Don Leandro, pouring a shot into the bottle’s plastic cap, and handing it to me. I returned the offer, and each of us drank in turn. Don Leandro then turned so he could take in the view up the valley, beyond the huts: “Again, here again... So peaceful (*tan tranquilo*). Our land (*nuestro propio terreno*). I’m here.”

A similar moment occurred one week when the roles were reversed. Exhausted from the hike (though not as completely weary as usual, since we had hired a truck for the first section of the route), I arrived with Sra Luz and Don Rocendo. Pavel was there already. He was one of a handful of younger people in the community to whom folk would turn if they were unable to fulfil their week of work *en turno*. This wasn’t a cheap solution for people who could not commit to a week in the páramo, and was really a last resort – it didn’t happen very often. Though the rates were negotiable, US\$10 per day for the seven days was the going rate. For this reason, most people would try and find a relative (or, on occasion, this visiting anthropologist) to go in their place. For a while there had been a full-time ‘*aguatero*²⁴’ (water-system manager) – but the community-assembly decision had been made to save money on the *aguatero* salary and for project-members to pledge more time to working *en turno*. Work on the pipeline had been woven in to people’s diverse routines and livelihoods.

For Pavel, this rare income was a great help as he continued to look for more regular work locally. He seemed quite at home in the páramo work, and got along well with

²⁴ Periodically, the question arose of whether to persist with the *en turno* system. In the space of seven months, I sat through three long meetings on the topic. Initially, the community had paid an *aguatero* – a ‘water manager,’ an individual responsible for pipeline maintenance and upkeep – at a cost of US\$400/month (more than the national minimum wage of US\$240/month). Though relatively well paid, this was a difficult existence, living in the páramo full-time. It also still made demands on the time of member-families, since two people at a time were scheduled as volunteers to accompany the *aguatero* each week. It was deemed preferable (by a majority) to save US\$5/month by slightly increasing the number of times one could be scheduled to work *en turno*. Two people at a time worked out at roughly one and a half ‘turns’ a year. Three people at a time was closer to twice a year.

everyone. This time I was a fourth pair of hands (not filling anyone's turn – only after a couple more visits had I proved to know the system sufficiently, and eventually I was left alone there for a couple of days when everyone else, over 18, had to go and vote in the National Referendum, May 2011). Sra Luz, Don Rocendo and I were to take over from Dario Rojas and Don Nicolás Copara (father of Patricio, above). Don Nicolás looked out toward Salcedo, in the distance, in the direction they would now walk home in. He shared his enjoyment of this place and, again, its 'tranquillity:' "all the way down there – I'm heading back now... back to everything. It's just not like it is up here... up here is somehow calmer. Further away. Further away from... troubles, concerns (*problemas, asuntos*)."

II. Conflict and Past Projects

Working in the páramo was not without troubles and concerns of its own, however. Numerous conflicts had been started: disputes between families and communities contesting ownership, challenging who was to have usufruct rights, and who should be granted concessions to draw water there, and on what terms. Don Rocendo, then in his 50s, recalled how his late father would describe the páramo to him – and thought there was something of a pattern to these arguments: "There have always been problems here, always. My father used to tell me. Even in earlier times – the time of the hacienda (*la época antes – la época de la hacienda*) – even then our páramo was known for problems: then, it was known for *robos*/thefts." Accusations of the theft of cattle continued to strain relations between communities.

Within San Isidro itself, historic divisions isolated families who lay singular claim to the páramo, disputes exacerbated during processes of Land Reform in the 1960s in Ecuador (v. Section III, below). For many, the chief value of the páramo lay in its water-giving properties. The central purpose of these regular weeks of *en turno* work was, after all, to ensure that water from the páramo would continue to flow into San Isidro for use in the irrigation of familial plots of land. In this section, I begin by outlining some of the inter- and intra-community tensions linked to questions of páramo ownership, and then illustrate how these conflicts have shaped the particular

interactions and demands involved in shared work on *el sistema*.

Rich in Water: Contested Ownership

On the national scale, the páramo hills are known to form part of a ‘water-storing ecosystem,’ an indirect source of water for the majority of urban and rural populations across Ecuador, especially in the *sierra* regions (Vásconez 2002: vii). They are said to function almost like a giant ‘sponge,’ absorbing rainfall, storing it, and releasing water gradually. It has been calculated that páramo lands can produce 1 litre of water per day per square metre and that, in Ecuador, 85% of water sources used for drinking water, for hydroelectric power systems, and for agricultural irrigation originate in the páramo (Ruíz 2009: 3, 24; Hofstede et al 2003; Alfaro Reyes et al 2007). The hills above San Isidro were no exception to this water-richness. As you hike in to Chaupi Urku Chilka Tingo, you come to the confluence of the *Río Cuchiwasi* and *Quebrada Condormatzay*: the start of the *Río Nagsiche* which flows on down through parishes of Pujilí and Salcedo cantons. Here you pass a fenced off sluice-gate, a curious concrete anomaly: this marks the start of one of many pipelines used for drinking water in the town of Pujilí, and surrounding districts. Whilst in urban areas the particular origins of drinking water can remain obscured or unacknowledged, closer to the source they are traced directly to these rivers and brooks.

Canals and pipelines leading from páramo springs and rivers down into the valleys below have long been a common feature across the region, and across the highlands²⁵. Some larger communities close to San Isidro already had irrigation-water supplies that had their source in the páramo. A number of pipelines had also been built in the region to provide drinking water for rural populations, drawing from the springs and streams of the páramo. These arrived in San Isidro and neighbouring Cochaloma in 1989-1990 (with support from *Visión Mundial*). Many of the broccoli

²⁵ According to CNRH (*Consejo Nacional de Recursos Hídricos* / National Council of Water Resources), 2723 licences for water extraction were granted in the 36 years between 1972 (under INERHI, see below) and 2008 – and this across the province of Cotopaxi which has a population of just over 400,000 in 7 cantons (Allauca 2011: 29).

and flower plantations in the Alpamalag valley had made deals with community- and private-owners of páramo land to draw their water and build their own pipelines, securing an exclusive irrigation source²⁶. The water that these brooks and rivers carry was highly prized: their offerings vital in a number of ways. As such, their use was contested within, and between, communities.

Ongoing conflicts over ownership and the utility of its water resources were two elements to the páramo that distinguish it from other communally-held areas. San Isidro's chapel and the original *casa comunal* were both built between 1967 and 1970 in the years immediately after Land Reform, and so both, like the páramo, symbolised that era of transition and formalisation of the community. By contrast, the central, concrete sports pitch at the heart of San Isidro, and the adjacent land now home to the primary school, were not secured till 1989 (with support from Pujilí Municipal Council). None, however, were at risk of being reclaimed or stolen (in fact the impetus is in the other direction: to expand by pushing for the *hacienda*-owner to sell more adjacent land, for development as a collectively-run agricultural project). Nor did any of these other shared areas play such a central role in the provision of water. Whilst this particular pipeline project had only recently been completed at the time of my fieldwork, the issue of irrigation and access to water had long been a preoccupation of the community.

Previous Bids: Alliances, Barriers and Concessions

Past attempts on the part of community leaders in San Isidro to initiate irrigation projects had repeatedly encountered two main hurdles. The first, in the form of intra-community conflicts which contested boundaries of ownership and usufruct rights. The second, in a combination of bureaucratic delay, obfuscation, corruption and the impenetrable interactions of various government agencies. The Ecuadorian Government nationalized all water resources in 1972 (Ruf & Apollin 1998), and

²⁶ The ability of plantations to invest in irrigation systems far outstripped that of any of the valley's communities, and this was reflected in different distributions of access to water (v. Appendix 1, Alpamalag Valley: Distribution of Water – a single hacienda plantation might access on average 10-20 times the amount of water compared to some neighbouring communities).

created a governmental body responsible for granting water extraction rights: INERHI (*Instituto Ecuatoriano de Recursos Hidráulicos* / Ecuadorian Institute of Water Resources). In the early 1990s, Don Leandro Rojas was president of San Isidro, and members of the community *directiva* submitted applications to INERHI for support in locating and delivering water from the *vertientes*/springs in Chaupi Urku. In the end, a rival bid from the neighbouring community of La Playa was successful, at the cost of San Isidro's chances.

Fifteen years later, the La Playa project was still beset by problems, and in such a state of disrepair that it was no longer functioning. The original construction, I was told, had been rushed and completed without conducting the necessary engineering surveys. A lack of technical experience among those responsible had meant professional engineers had to be hired in as consultants on any repair work, which was prohibitively expensive. This was in marked contrast to the situation in San Isidro: Don Jorge Llumiquinga had worked in the past as a trained technician for a regional government body responsible for water infrastructure, and could be hired at a daily worker's rate (US\$15) – far more affordable when shared among the 85 participating families. For the La Playa pipeline, however, which frequently sprung leaks as a result of its hurried construction, the costs of repairs had begun to exceed the government funding received, and those leaks had gradually become more and more damaging.

Sections of pipe lay exposed to the elements beside the hillside path that led up to the páramo. As we walked past just such a scene, on our way to our week of *en turno* work, I asked Sra Luz and Don Rocendo about the contrasting fates of these two irrigation projects. Sra Luz was taken aback, and spoke with a pained expression across her face, shaking her head as we traipsed through a particularly deep, muddy section of path: “their pipeline's not completed? still not yet, after working on it all this time? you mean... they don't have any water? That's terrible. Terrible. We made sacrifices. We suffered – but at least we have water now. Plenty of water...”

A few years later, after the first unsuccessful attempt to secure support for a San

Isidro pipeline, a second venture adopted a different strategy. A number of *hacienda*-plantations and residents in the parish of Mulalillo (in the neighbouring canton of Salcedo) had previously acquired government licences for water extraction from rivers originating in Chaupi Urku. Again the San Isidro *directiva* (then led by Don Jorge Llumiquinga) put together a proposal. This set out to negotiate a deal whereby San Isidro would take on responsibility for protecting these sources (by managing grazing in the area, and native tree-planting to maintain groundwater levels) in exchange for water concessions (partial use of the *acequia*/irrigation channel in use by Mulalillo residents) (OPIJJ 2009: 130-1). Unfortunately, this also required the authorization of CNRH (Concejo Nacional de Recursos Hídricos / National Council of Water Resources, the government department created in 1994 to replace INERHI), and this would prove difficult to acquire. Without the go-ahead of La Playa to route a pipeline across land belonging to that community, the appropriate licence would not be granted. Not only was this refused, but a lack of funding for the necessary technical surveys meant that this proposal eventually also had to be shelved.

In 2007, the recently-elected Correa government had created INAR (*Instituto Nacional de Riego* / The National Institute for Irrigation). Responsible for managing the use of water for irrigation throughout the country, this governmental body was to focus in particular on small-scale agricultural production, localised distribution patterns, and the protection of (water-rich) ecosystems (El Diario 2007). This saw an increase in the number of localised irrigation projects funded by the government – as hundreds of bold roadside signs would testify, announcing another successful project, naming the funding recipient(s), the amount provided by INAR, the name of the lead project Engineer, all with a backdrop of the national flag and (more recently) the government's slogan '*La Revolución Ciudadana está en Marcha*'.²⁷ There were a number of these in the Alpamalag valley, and in other parts of the province, and of the country. Further north, they could be seen frequently around Cayambe – coincidentally another part of Ecuador where notoriously thirsty floriculture plantations tend to attract opponents to their intensive water-usage (v. Chapter 6).

²⁷ 'The Citizen's Revolution is under way.'

It was in January 2009 when San Isidro was part of a successful bid for INAR funding on a project which was to provide support for small-scale family agriculture. A joint application outlined a proposal for a pipeline to deliver water from the páramo hills to families living in a number of communities downstream, for use in irrigating small plots and parcels of land. This was one of the first features of this project to mark it out against those previous: it was on an unprecedented scale. Rather than addressing the water-needs of only one community, the application was made through OPIJJ (*Organización del Pueblo Indígena de Jatun Juigua* / Organization of Indigenous Communities in Jatun Juigua), and proposed a system that would benefit seven different communities (most of them much smaller than San Isidro, but all members of OPIJJ). Consequently, it was significantly larger than most of the projects advertised on the signs, which usually amounted to US\$100,000 to US\$200,000. The final figure for the San Isidro / OPIJJ project came to just over US\$1.5million.

Taken as a whole, the project was made possible by this alliance, and by the standing of OPIJJ as a recognised indigenous organisation. Though negotiations began in 2008 and the funding awarded in 2009, construction of pipeline was delayed by almost a year (fully completed and operational in August 2010). Despite the significant sums of funding involved, delays in receipt of an amount of US\$300,000 prevented key storage tanks being built, and INAR refused to pay upfront for the necessary technical studies. In the end, these surveys were funded via grants made to OPIJJ from two international NGOs who had been working in Cotopaxi and across Ecuador for a number of years (Visión Mundial and HEIFER International). The fact that this bid had a successful outcome reinforces ideas about the purpose and potential of organising with, and through, the Indigenous Movement and the alliances it fosters. In this light, *el sistema* itself symbolizes the value and viability of inter-community action.

In order to benefit from the new pipeline, Juigua, Chinibamba, La Playa, Tuglín and Rayoloma, all smaller communities, entered into agreements with Yacubamba – the largest community-member of OPIJJ and somewhere that already had access to some

irrigation water. The new pipeline would provide 50 litres per second, and this would be split evenly between Yacubamba and these satellite communities on the one hand, and San Isidro on the other. This was a good deal for San Isidro, but one that was hard won. In order for this agreement to be settled, water for the project would be sourced from springs and streams higher up in the hills, more difficult to access, and on land that was more clearly recognised as belonging to San Isidro (rather than, for example, the larger *Río Nagsiche* which runs through páramo lands belonging to a number of communities). This would require more maintenance work, and performing that work would be more demanding and time-consuming, given the distances involved. Part of the deal was also that San Isidro would take on primary responsibility for this maintenance work. Whilst future funding was to be made available through INAR for the cost of necessary replacement parts and materials, requisite labour and technical expertise would have to be sourced somewhere else, with San Isidro responsible for these measures also.

Whilst these seem like tall demands, they had actually contributed to the success – thus far – of the project. These responsibilities required member-households of the pipeline in San Isidro to devote more of their time, money and effort to its upkeep and maintenance than any other collective undertaking. People's engagement with the project was thus more regular than in past scenarios. It was also the case that a greater number of households participated than in previous projects. Whether the pipeline will continue to function successfully in the long-term remains to be seen but, four years in, this project had already outlasted other initiatives – and here this inclusivity (in terms of numbers of participants) and regularity (in terms of the amount of work required of those participants) had been critical.

Regular Commitment: Responsibility and Participation

We herded the alpacas back towards the corral, weary after hiking with them up to a high patch of pasture during the day. At least on the descent it was easier to catch your breath, though the endless, large tufts of *paja* could still make progress tricky. As we walked, Don Rocendo casually ushered in to the windswept silence a soft

silver whisper – the sound of his machete brushing across the ubiquitous waves of *paja*. We could hear the alpacas in front of us, though those lower down the vertiginous hillside were quite some distance away. Sra Luz chuckled an impression of their muffled, quizzical moans. As we talked, I heard about her childhood, the death of her *huasipunguero* father, and a brief description of an offering (*entrega*) she had made quietly the previous evening. At dusk, with Pavel’s help, she had dug very small hole in each corner of the alpaca corral – just big enough to fit two fingers into. In each, she placed a small amount of quinoa grain, then marked a cross in the earth with her stick. The three of us remained silent throughout. “That? that’s so our crops, and the quinoa that we plant, grow healthily (*aumente*), and the alpacas too, an offering to God... this is my belief (*pensamiento*), just as my dear mother, just as my father used to say (*conversaban*), I too carry this in my heart (*llevando eso en el corazón*).”



Figure 6 – Don Rocendo (r) holds an alpaca whilst Sra Luz sprays salt water from her mouth to treat the animal’s eye infection. The páramo *casita*/hut is in the background.

Sra Luz also shared with me some of her experiences of working for the *hacienda* which, even after the changes of Land Reform in the 1960s, was gruelling, with

workers paid a pittance: “and so I worked, as a farmhand, with a hoe/*azadon*, weeding maize fields, weeding the potatoes, planting, harvesting, that’s how I worked and he only paid 2 *sucres*, each day, from 4[am] till 7[pm], working like that I helped my dear mother... from age 12 – when my dear father died, my mother left alone – till age 19, when I got married, that’s when I worked in the *hacienda*. I didn’t go to school, I worked.”

I heard how a few alpacas had died not long after they were first brought up to the páramo, almost 18 months previously. There had been 35 of them originally, purchased for the community by HEIFER International, as part of a growing interest in páramo conservation within the development sector. A few months after our conversation, there were more deaths, with others losing weight and suffering illnesses. In one week there were two premature births, and eventually the decision was made to bring 15 alpacas down to the more temperate, forgiving climes of San Isidro, leaving just 10 in the páramo.

Nonetheless, Sra Luz felt that even this situation was preferable to what had happened last time San Isidro embarked on a shared livestock initiative. Just over ten years ago, and as part of a development programme to diversify rural production, the same NGO (HEIFER International) had supplied a number of sheep for home-grazing, which could be fattened up and sold for meat at the regional weekly livestock market in Salcedo. A number of women were interested – the project focused on women as recipients, according both to the priorities of the NGO, and to the fact that the majority of domestic livestock rearing is done by women in San Isidro. In the end, 30 sheep were distributed among ten households. The project soon folded, however, and a proposed second round never occurred: “There were such problems. *Envidia/jealousy*... a lot of angry people. It had to finish.” The project was not sufficiently inclusive, and lines of division intensified between those invited to participate, and those who were not. An uneven distribution of the clear material benefits of the project quickly reduced its viability to zero.

By contrast, with the irrigation water pipeline, everyone in San Isidro had been

invited to ‘join.’ There were only a small number of households who had not joined. Some, who lived higher up the hills closer to La Playa, had negotiated periodic access to an irrigation channel belonging to that community. Others lived close to Santa Rosa de Cochaloma and had also made alternative arrangements. Others still had rented out their land to other community-residents, or no longer grew a lot of produce and thus depended on their plots less for food and income (and were able to risk a particularly parched dry season). It was still a majority of households that participated: of 92 households in the San Isidro census, 85 were members of the pipeline. In comparison with previous community initiatives, *el sistema* directly involved a far greater proportion of community-residents.

The pipeline project also demanded regular participation – in meetings, *mingas* and the *en turno* work described above. This was also integral to its perpetuation. By contrast, the gradual decline of the ‘Red Scarves’ youth-group so regretful for Patricio, as we saw, was said to have occurred when it became more and more irregular. The longer it became between meetings or events, the harder it was to coordinate people to gather. Some had started jobs based outside of San Isidro, others had moved away altogether or perhaps had got married or started a family of their own. Without a regular structure, it became more difficult to recruit new members. This was not the only difficulty that youth-groups in San Isidro had faced, however.

Sra Luz also gave me her account of the doomed ‘*Proyecto de centro de capacitación ambiental*’ (Project for an Environmental Learning Centre), something that had been group-led by 24 older members of the ‘Red Scarves,’ with support from the *directiva*. This came up in conversation when we were down in the valley bottom beside *Río Cuchiwasi*, a brook that was in full-flow following a night of rain. We were there gathering firewood, when Sra Luz pointed out to me two dips in the hillside, and the outline of a terrace beside a grassy clearing – overgrown now and not immediately obvious to the eye. As we got closer, she told me how the two holes had been dug – about 2m squared by 1.5m deep – as pools for keeping and breeding trout, beside the stream. The clearing had been used as grazing for around 20 sheep

and lambs and, in 1997, a small amount of funding from *Visión Mundial* had been used for materials to build three thatch-roof huts similar to those more recently in use by those working *en turno* on the pipeline.

Only a few months after the buildings had been completed and the pools filled, however, things took a dramatic turn for the worse. Germania Rojas was there with tía Yulisa and her daughter, when they were disturbed in the middle of the night, looked out of the door of their hut, and saw the other two buildings ablaze. Panicked, they grabbed what they could in the darkness, and began a hasty retreat back to San Isidro to tell people what had happened. After a few minutes they heard a huge explosion behind them – probably the cooking-gas canister or the petrol generator that were there, or both, exploding. No one knows for sure who did it, but consensus in San Isidro pointed the finger at members of the Toapanta family.

Ever since the páramo came into community ownership, they alone have had at least one family member living there. During my time in San Isidro, Sra Susana Toapanta kept a small flock of sheep and a few cows in the valley below the pipeline huts, living in a small thatched house, relying on occasional deliveries of staple foodstuffs brought up on horseback by a younger relative. Due to this continuous occupation, the Toapanta family claimed sole ownership of the páramo, and rejected any use of it made by the community as a whole. There had been legal cases and appeals, and when I left the dispute was thoroughly unresolved. The Toapantas also cited ‘written documents’ they said they had recently come into the possession of, and referred to their contents which stated that only one of the ‘34’ *huasipungueros*, one who is their direct relative, had actually been granted land-rights to the páramo.

Sides had been fiercely drawn. Though I spoke with her a couple of times, and also with her brother Don Hipolito who lived back down in San Isidro, conversation tussled unsuccessfully to undo the reticence surrounding this issue. On more than one occasion I was told we simply couldn’t discuss it since the legal *juicio* (judgment/trial) was ongoing: the fear was that stray words could be recorded and used as ‘evidence’ by a rival party. Don Jorge would repeat his suspicions

surrounding the timing of this case being brought, questioning the motives for doing so at a time so soon after the nearby community of Yacubamba, which already has extensive páramo lands of its own, had expressed interest in purchasing more. The owner of another adjacent area of páramo, Don Rodrigo Sanchez, had also apparently made enquiries in this light.

The renewed interest in the páramo highlights its increasing economic value. Its owner could sell it on to other communities or private buyers as pasture land for ‘wild’ cattle or, for a regular fee, licence the use of its water and streams. A single family holding the deeds to ‘San Isidro’s páramo’ could stand to make a significant sum of money. The now constant presence of community-members working there on the pipeline had thus deepened these divisions.

These were not the only dividing lines at play, however. Another cluster of families linked to Don Enrique Copara also disputed the shared ownership of *Chaupi Urku*, but they did not object to the pipeline, and continued to participate in its ongoing work. Everyone I spoke with, however, was clear about the origins of these conflicts, tracing their roots to the mid-late 1960s – the era of Ecuador’s first Agrarian Reform Law.

III. *Huasipungueros*, Remembrance and 1964 Land Reform

“They told me about their slavery”

Sitting beside her cooking-fire, my septuagenarian neighbour and adoptive grandmother, Sra Enriqueta Guamán, looked up from under her worn hat as I came to her door. In a brief pause from the task-in-hand, she smiled, and turned back to the fire, stirring its roots with a length of iron. A light rain tapped on the corrugated roof. The cement-block walls were smoked black, blackened with years of culinary dwelling, tending the fire. All that smoke, from all that wood, generations of growth and harvest, heating and eating. Some signs of these currents marked and frayed her

shawl, an unfailingly navy blue sitting over her bright-blue-bead necklace, and under her golden heart-shaped earrings. The task-in-hand was working through a great sackful of alpaca hair, teasing-out every tiny imperfection, speck or minute splinter of dirt, dust, grass, plant – anything that interrupted its otherwise fine, un-processed nap and dusky white appearance. To do so to make it ready for weaving, potentially for sale to weavers recently set-up in business on the Pujilí-Tigua road. Without looking, her fingers twitched through every strand and found offending flecks. Each picked out and flicked toward the fire.

She noticed me noticing occasional winces, fitful marks of felt pain, there in a shrinking of eyes, a tightening of cheeks, a momentary flinch. Breaking from the work, with a sigh, shoulders relaxed and hands resting in her lap, she showed me her arthritic hands and swollen knuckles, and told me how, “my hands hurt – here, and here – they hurt a lot these days. I live with the pain, and it hurts when I work... I can’t even go down to collect wood for the fire – my bones ache...” Then, in the same breath, “For three months, once, I lived up in the páramo, where the alpacas are today, looking after the cattle... when I was young, to help my father: the livestock belonged to the hacienda-owner... sometimes I would be there for less time, two weeks, one month, sometimes with sheep and lambs, sometimes on horseback herding the livestock, putting them to pasture... right up there in the hills, right on the top of the hills, riding a horse... in the rain, in the cold, it was so hard – it was lonely work, a lonely time, and frightening – and now, see how I suffer”.

Forty-seven years had passed since 1964 (the year of the Agrarian Reform Law) and 2011 (when most of my fieldwork was conducted). A few older residents in San Isidro recalled, as children, working alongside their parents under the direction of the *arrendatario*/tenant-farmer and his *mayordomo*/farm-steward on the *hacienda*. Only a very few, who were older at the time, had lived to an age where stories of life under the *hacienda* could still be shared in person.

Effectively, this functioned as a system of ‘debt peonage’ (Korovkin 2000; Pallares 2002) – or ‘slavery’ in the words and recollections of some who live here. Talking

with 18-year old Iván, above, I asked what it was about working on the project that he enjoyed, what made him want to do it, what encouraged him to share in the work. He replied: “My grandparents used to tell me how their life was extremely hard: they lived as slaves lived – they told me about their slavery... it’s not like that now, now that we have Human Rights. They say there’s no more slavery now, and maybe I believe it... but life is still very hard. Very hard. For me, the community is important: this place, this project: the water... all are important to us these days. And this is why we work here [in the páramo]. This is why I am here working now”. Others echoed his sentiments. In my first week there, Juan-Carlos told me, “my granddad worked here, kept cows... and that’s why I like to work here too,” whilst Patricio also emphasised the *sacrificio*/sacrifice made by his recent ancestors in order to leave him the legacy he had inherited; “It’s for the work of my dear grandparents, for my mother and father – for all that I’m working here now”.

The oppressive conditions that *huasipungueros* lived under were as typically harsh as those experienced in other highland estates (Lyons 2006; Ferraro 2008). Lashings and even imprisonment were punishments meted out for the death of an animal to anyone who might have been on watch at the time (OPIJJ 2009: 58). These experiences echoed those documented in Jorge Icaza’s famous novel, *Huasipungo*, dating originally from the 1930s (1934) – a time when many indigenous people in the highlands suffered acutely at the hands of private landlords and tenant-farmers, perhaps more than under the pre-independence colonial system which at least nominally offered ‘mediation’ and ‘brakes on abuse’ through indigenous courts (Lane 2003: 91). Similarly, *huasipungueros* could find themselves stuck in financial obligation having received credit lent against future wages, or fined or held collectively liable for perceived damage to hacienda equipment or property (Zevallos 1989: 43). I heard similar accounts in San Isidro. One day, again sitting stooped beside her cooking-fire, her fingers slowly peeling small round potatoes with a knife, Sra Enriqueta told me that of these tenant farm-managers, “some [were] worse than others, but all of them fierce”.

Whilst the leaseholders changed over time, up until Land Reform in the 1960s, ownership of the land itself was claimed by (and granted to) the Catholic Church (the Augustinian nuns of San Juan, Quito). The Gallegos family who live on the hacienda today have been there since 1964. That was the year of the Agrarian Reform Law, which “proscribed the *huasipungo*... system and other precapitalist arrangements, referred to under the generic name of *precarismo*²⁸” (Zevallos 1989: 43). In the rhetoric of the time, these were increasingly seen as “an embarrassment” to the country (Handelman 1980: 8). Mirroring political events across the subcontinent²⁹, the governmental decision had been made – it was time for agrarian reform.

IERAC and Commodification

The Agricultural Census of 1954 was instrumental in delineating the ‘problems’ at hand. It revealed that “0.4% of all owners occupied 45% of total farmland, while 90% of farms (involving half of the country’s population) were too small to support a single family” (Wasserstrom 2010: 2)³⁰. Such facts stirred a call for action among “humanitarian and liberal elements within the country” (Hanratty 1989: 121). This was in addition to the still largely ignored, ongoing struggles of indigenous groups, for whom such numbers constructed merely a slight and overdue, institutional exposition of what direct experience had incessantly been telling them, and for which an ‘Indigenous Movement’ had formed and negotiated an increasing number of alliances and political strategies (Becker 2008, 2007, 1999; Clark & Becker 2007).

There was also lobbying from the owners of large banana or coffee plantations in the

²⁸ Those set to ‘benefit’ from Land Reform were, consequently, collectively referred to as *precaristas* (Zevallos 1989: 43).

²⁹ “From 1950 to 1970, almost every Latin American country engaged in some sort of land redistribution program as part of its overall modernization strategy, In Peru and El Salvador, approximately 20 percent of farm households received land; in Bolivia (1952), 75 percent, and in Nicaragua (1963), 50 percent (de Janvry, Sadoulet, and Wolford 2001: 4; see also de Janvry 1981; Grindle 1986; Thiesenhusen 1995)” (Wolford 2010: 73). The impact and design of these policies of Reform are examined further in Chapter 4 (the growth in labour migration) and Chapter 7 (the assumptions underpinning ‘modernization’).

³⁰ “According to [the 1954] census, 81.7% of the 260 thousand farms in the Sierra, smaller than 5 Ha. covered only 10.8% of the total area, while 1.2% of the farms larger than 100 Ha. controlled 64.4% of the total area... [this is compared with the 1994 Census where] 80.2% of the 389 thousand farms in the Sierra, smaller than 5 Ha., covered 14.1% of the total area, while 1.6% of the farms, with more than 100 Ha. controlled 42.9% of the total area” (Francescutti 2002: ii).

coastal regions who sought to swell the ranks of workers described as ‘cheap labour’ (Hanratty 1989: 121, v. Chapter 4). Such pressures combined in the ‘drive to capitalize,’ and the unprecedented commodification not only of land but also of labour (Wolford 2010: 72; Bretón 2008: 593). This dominant rhetoric was readily espoused by the national coordinating body the *Junta Nacional de Planificación y Coordinación Económica* (JNPC: National Planning Board): “Colonization is a matter of public interest and should take maximum advantage of appropriate lands to expand agricultural production by settling rural families on their own parcels, improving their standard of living and helping them to use more efficient and rational agro-economic techniques” (JNPC 1963: 5, at Wasserstrom 2010: 3). These grand ideas and narratives of ‘progress’ (v. Chapter 7) inevitably had to find specific routes toward implementation, and the name of the government body that was subsequently formed to facilitate this was IERAC.

At the same time that this first land reform law – *The Land Reform, Idle Lands, and Settlement Act* – came into force in 1964 and outlawed the *huasipungo* system, the military government established IERAC (*Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización*): the Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Settlement, a body charged with “administering the law and expropriating idle arable land for redistribution to farmers” (Hanratty 1989: 121). Echoing the words of Sra Senovia (in Chapter 1), Sra Enriqueta would tell me how change came when the land had been divided up by “IERAC” (*yer-ak*), and when families such as her own were granted title-deeds, by IERAC, to the *huasipungo* plots they had previously farmed and lived on as a *huasipunguero*.

Whilst the *huasipungo* plots received were usually (if not universally) of inferior quality to the hacienda land that *huasipungueros* had worked before the Land Reform acts (Zevallos 1989: 43), people in neighbouring parishes who received ‘expropriated’ land were similarly just about guaranteed land of poor quality. The Land Reform Law declared land for expropriation to be: (i) unused land (not ‘exploited’ in the last 3 years), (ii) insufficiently utilised (less productive, by output, than the regional average), (iii) where the National Planning Board had identified

demographic pressures, and (iv) areas where employment laws had not been adhered to (Francescutti 2002: 5). San Isidro, due to the years of non-payment of wages, fell under category (iv). Meanwhile, as ‘redistributed’ land, the páramo was considered ‘unused’ land. Even though the páramo was – and is – used as pasture land, more recent figures continue the trend of discounting it as ‘agricultural land’: “A total of 31% of the continental area of Ecuador, around 8,173,000 Ha. are used in activities related to agriculture and livestock grazing. Meanwhile 18,192,000 Ha. or 69% are not used for agricultural production purposes, as they include urban areas protected areas, watersheds and other areas that have no direct agricultural use such as: the high plateau (*alto páramo*), the mountain ranges, etc” (Francescutti 2002: i).

Landowners, then, had the opportunity to ‘redistribute’ the land that they used and valued least. Located 20km away from the San Isidro *hacienda*, unsuitable for crop production, and a relatively hazardous place for grazing-livestock to live and be herded, the páramo was a prime candidate for redistribution. For years, the páramo was “forgotten.” As Porfirio put it: “at that time, when they handed over (*entregaron*) those lands they thought they were nothing (*invalidas*), and handed them over like they were redundant (*como de sobre*), worthless (*tierras que no sirven*) or of no value (*que no tienen valor*).” He described it as a kind of ‘justice’ that today the páramo was recognized as a ‘source of life’ (*fuentes de vida*) for the community, and also for humanity itself since the páramo is where water springs from (*donde nace el agua*).

The páramo, then, had undergone a transformation from neglected hills to ‘source of life.’ These processes of transformation had coincided with, and intensified through, the regular action that the pipeline project demanded, and that an increasing number of people participated in. Land Reform had initiated communal ownership, and subsequent work had cast the various properties of the páramo in new light, emphasising how the physical environment emerges as both a space and a product of ‘social historical processes’ (Narotzky 1997: 8). Increasing recognition of the páramo as being rich in water reflects how a natural resource is similarly ‘produced,’ not simply something that exists but rather something that acquires different value

and importance at different historical moments, and is thus ‘made to become’ (Bankoff & Boomgaard 2007:1, at Bray 2013: 57). Such a process of ‘becoming’ is not simply a matter of being made accessible, for example by people acquiring the ‘means to harness’ a particular resource (Narotzky 1997: 10). Rather, as Ingold (1993; 2000; 2008) maintains, ‘becoming’ is a relational process involving human action and perception as dynamic features of the world they take place within: “only through inhabiting can the world be constituted, in relation to a being, as its environment” (Ingold 2000: 40).

The transformation of the páramo thus underlines how socio-historical influences include not only momentous events (such as Land Reform in the 1960s) but also the more gradual, emergent effects of concerted action. Shared work on the pipeline thus produced both material resources (in terms of irrigation water and the agricultural harvests it supported) and reframed people’s ideas about the physical environment itself. At the same time, parallel changes were expressed regarding the community. Whilst the project made significant demands of people’s time, it was also the successful culmination of past efforts to secure, fund and build an irrigation-water supply. Through the ‘worldly circumstances of human action’ the collective subject, or ‘received category,’ that had initiated the project – the *comunidad* – had been ‘revalued in practice’ (Sahlins 1981: 67). Through more extensive, and more regular, action carried out in the páramo, the sense of purpose, or viability, of acting as part of the community had been redefined – and the community subsequently described as *organizada*/organized. However, despite these positive re-evaluations there were still divisions within San Isidro, and questions persisted regarding the ownership of land.

The Plaque and *Pertenencia*

In the years between Land Reform and the more recent, coordinated attempts of the San Isidro *directiva* to use the páramo as a source for irrigation (dating from the 1990s, as above), only a couple of families, related to Don Enrique Copara, had been regular visitors there (aside from the Toapanta family, living there). They described

themselves as *ganaderos* (herdsmen), and had kept on with the practice of herding ‘wild’ cattle (*toros bravos*) at pasture in the páramo. The animals were free to roam the hills, and every week or so, a *ganadero* would travel up by horseback to check on them, and to retrieve them from more distant slopes, if necessary. Don Enrique suggested most people had been slow to recognise the potential of the communally-held land: “the páramo had been completely forgotten (*bien olvidado*) and most people here, what do they care? Now they’re there, with the alpacas... ok. We’ve been there all along, taking care of the place, now they’re there too, taking care of what they neglected for so long – of the páramo we’ve been working in all along! Recently, only a year or so – they’ve just realised, they’ve just woken up to the water there in the páramo – if it weren’t for the water, would they care at all? No!”

One of his grandsons, Hendry (the musician, above) was quick to highlight the divisions within San Isidro regarding the páramo, with his own ideas about which members of which families had a justified claim to *pertenencia*/ownership. He felt secure in this regard in his own lineage, and made claims that weren’t ever echoed by other people I spoke to: “I don’t remember why, but I’ve been told my father’s family has more right here: *we* have *pertenencia*... that’s why I love being here... water *is* for everyone – that’s the law, but the páramo belongs to those families, those particular families who fought in the struggle... and don’t you think, if I work hard and struggle, work hard enough for many years to then leave some land to my children, that it is they, my children, who should receive the land and own it after me? My own children, not other people’s?”

Compared to the tensions between most of the community and the Toapanta family who claimed sole ownership of *Chaupi Urku Chilka Tingo*, these complaints were minor, and never taken further than such casual conversation. All divisions around *pertenencia*, however, had their roots in Land Reform processes after 1964. Though the *comunidad* operated with a *directiva* and was engaged in collective efforts to secure landholdings and achieve freedom from the *hacienda* regime in the 1960s, San Isidro at that time was not a legally registered entity. As such, the páramo was granted as ‘family heritage’ (*patrimonio familiar*) to ‘La Comunidad de San Isidro’

(v. Chapter 7). The validity of documents held by different factions, pertaining to support their claims to the páramo, were continually disputed.



Figure 7 – Danny Llumiquinga (l) and friends read names on the *huasipungueros* memorial plaque in the páramo.

It is significant, then, that the ceremony held to inaugurate the pipeline in 2010, included not only a thanksgiving ceremony, but also the laying of a plaque (Fig.7). It sat beside the project-hut, with dramatic views up and down the valley. It was there to commemorate the lives of 34 ‘*Wuasipungueros*³¹’ (forced-labourers on the hacienda) whose toil and efforts secured the rights to this area of páramo for the community in May 1968. They were named, individually, in painted black lettering. This had been stamped shallowly into the marble, and was struggling to withstand

³¹ The plaque uses the less Latinised spelling of the Kichwa word (*Wuasipunguero*) which in most literature is spelled *huasipunguero*. or *wasipunguero* following recent Kichwa orthography (which replaces the Spanish-based *hu* with *w* [Uzendoski 2004:899]).

the elements. Along side the pledge to care for the páramo forever, it stated its solemn message of suffering, sacrifice and gratitude: *En memoria de los 34 Huasipungueros que entregaron su vida en la hacienda San Isidro para heredarnos este páramo* (In memory of the 34 *Huasipungueros* who gave their lives working on the *Hacienda San Isidro* so that we would inherit this páramo). This ceremony, then, was an opportunity for such foundational stories to be retold and reappraised, another way in which the pipeline had drawn San Isidro residents to ‘inhabit’ (Ingold 2000: 40) the páramo.

Evaluation

We have seen that regular action on *el sistema* not only alters the physical environment, but also transforms ‘intersubjective experience’ (Jackson 2005: 37) in ways similar to this particular act of remembrance (the laying of the plaque), with its emphasis on protecting both land and memory. Lambek draws a distinction between two interrelated aspects of action (2010a: 19f.): specific acts (performance) and ongoing judgment (practice). ‘Acts’ are singular and irreversible (instances or specific moments of performance), and ‘practice’ is continuous and ongoing (a matter of ‘living one’s life’). Performative acts establish criteria for evaluating subsequent practice. In his example, the performance of a wedding (the act of marriage) positions those getting married in relation to a particular set of alternatives out of the many available. This relation then provides criteria for whether their subsequent actions are judged to fall under certain descriptions (such as ‘faithful’) or not (Lambek 2010b: 39). Some of the consequences of ‘acts,’ then, are ideas that shape how people judge (and assess, and feel about) actions in general.

How people engage with these judgments is a matter of ‘evaluation’ which, for Arendt, is a social process and ‘springs from and anticipates the presence of others’ (Arendt 1968: 220, at Jackson 2009: 237). It is itself a form of action, undertaken in relation to what others do and believe in (Arendt 1978: 193). It is thus a way of “thinking through one’s relationships with others” (Jackson 2009: 240) and considering what meanings ‘my’ actions have for other people (Ron 1997: 279;

Kenrick 2011b: 30). By participating in acts, and in forming interpersonal relationships (Guyer 1999: 128), we bring about, respond to, and refashion the ways in which we understand the importance of our own actions (Lambek 2010b: 43; Graeber 2001). ‘Evaluation’ relates not only to the descriptions we use to assess action, but is also ‘prospective’ (assessing what is to be done, how, and by who), ‘immediate’ (doing the right thing, making use of what is available), and ‘retrospective’ (acknowledging past action and events, and their relation to the present moment) (Lambek 2010b: 42-3). The combination of experiences, obligations, and interactions (that regular work on the pipeline both facilitates and demands) reflects all three of these aspects of evaluation. The ‘consequences’ of regular *en turno* action, then, have led to the páramo (and the work that is done there) being ‘re-evaluated’ by those involved.

This framing depends on a broader interpretation of ‘specific performative acts’ than that which Lambek describes. Examples of ‘performative acts’ are frequently moments of ritual and, if not singular and unique, then they are ‘specific,’ such as public acts of forgiveness, or simply ‘calling someone by name,’ or ‘expressing condolences’ (Lambek 2010b: 45; 2013: 145, 149). Does it make sense to interpret a week’s *en turno* activity in the páramo in the company of others, working on a shared and mutually-created project, as ‘performance’ (rather than as a ‘matter of living one’s life’ in Lambek’s words, or what for Arendt would be labour and work)?

Following Lambek’s own reading of Arendt, I think the answers here are in the affirmative: like *acts*, *action* involves moments of human activity which ‘bring into play something new in the world,’ moments which only come about through interaction between and among collectivities, and which are thus in tension between doing and being-done-to, or ‘suffering’ (Lambek 2010b: 50-1; Arendt 1958: 246). The unpredictable and irreversible consequences (Arendt 1958: 233) might be private and intangible (a new intersubjective experience is one form of consequence), but they are always formed in relation to others – just as *acts* depend on social recognition (Lambek 2010b: 51; Arendt 1958: 233). To take part in action, then, is to be implicated in the specific effects which that action produces, whilst also playing

an active role in creating the conditions that enable it to take place. It is to become part of a shared endeavour, and to commit both to the relevance of the ‘criteria’ that are reproduced, and to the means of producing them (Lambek 2010b: 45). Regular *en turno* work was taking place in a landscape whose history was contested, a history also associated with suffering – and today this work actively sought to reverse those conditions and associations. Whilst the work was an ‘obligation’ as part of tightly-administered community project, whose purpose was centred around the provision of irrigation water, it also influenced people’s evaluations of past efforts, proposed changes, and assessments of the use made of available resources (Lambek 2010b: 42-3).

IV. Conclusion: Reclaiming and Revaluing

At one of the long meetings, mentioned above, which had focused on the future of *el sistema* and the *en turno* work-arrangements, we had split up into four groups to discuss how the system might be better maintained. Leading the session, Porfirio had left us with some broad questions to think about, including “what do we mean, what do we understand, by ‘a system’?” This met with a lot of impatient responses, questioning how worthwhile it was to talk about such abstractions. Later in the meeting, each group reported back to the whole assembly on their discussions. Porfirio pointed out that *el sistema* was not just the pipes, tanks, reservoirs, valves and such that people had described, but the whole system, which included the end-point – the ‘purpose’ of having water: growing food³². “No one – no one in any of the four groups – mentioned this at all. Let’s not forget this.”

Had his leading question been more straightforward (eg. ‘what is the system *for*?’) then perhaps ‘food production’ would have been more likely to come up in the discussion. It seems telling, however, that nearly everyone’s description of *el sistema*

³² Another initiative in San Isidro whilst I was there was *una rueda de producción* (a ‘Food Circle’), which aimed to encourage trade and exchange between food producers within San Isidro itself, relying less on the weekly market in Pujilí (described in Partridge & Chavez-Tafur 2011; Partridge 2012). There were far fewer participants in the *rueda* project than in the pipeline project, and it operated in a more ad hoc, informal fashion, without the administrative support of the community *directiva*.

focused instead on the physical structures of the pipeline and their correct operation – on the work involved – and not on this overall ‘purpose.’ The productive capacities linked to the pipeline were just one set of associations that people held – though still of great importance. Precipitation is low in San Isidro and, like other highland regions, conditions would be described as semiarid, where agriculture is constrained by the availability of water (Bebbington & Perreault 1999: 405). As Sra Luz, above, emphasised, the great ‘sacrifice and suffering’ involved, over the years, to make the project happen had all been worth it.

Action on the pipeline was also associated with a range of experiences to be had in this place, and the stories to be shared, histories to be retold. In describing the work – and in doing the work itself – the correct operation of the pipeline became just one of many concerns whilst there. Indeed, for younger people (*los jóvenes*), a week *en turno* in the páramo recreated for them the experience of working there, which many had heard about from their grandparents. For *los jóvenes*, though, this experience was not the result of ‘slavery.’ Quite the contrary, participating in such cooperative action was testament to ongoing efforts carried out as part of the community. Far from being a form of ‘bound’ work, they could even discuss, debate and arrange when they could be there, and who with. Such action, then, ‘reclaimed’ the páramo – recasting it as a place that is *propio* (‘our own,’ as Hendry, Sra Luz and Don Leandro, above, described it, a phrase used frequently by everyone who worked there) – and, in the process, going some way to ‘reversing the violent events’ endured by community-members and their forebears in the past (Jackson 2005: 37).

I suggest that action associated with the pipeline thus creates an object that both materializes and symbolizes value. The water the pipeline delivers to San Isidro has transformed what crops can grow there and in what quantities. In this sense, the pipeline has value in and of itself. The pipeline project had also succeeded where past attempts had failed, and finally reversed a situation where San Isidro residents only had access to an unequal share of irrigation channels claimed by the *hacienda*. Again following Lambek, the pipeline can be seen as the materialization of past efforts, and has been at the centre of the transformation of the páramo from distant,

isolated hillsides into a regularly visited site of historical significance. The pipeline also symbolizes the ongoing work and energies that are dedicated to its upkeep, and the renewed relations that the organisation of work initiates.

The forms of collective action (and interaction) that the pipeline both enabled and required were particular to the conditions of project activity, and were unlike those of previous projects (in terms of time and effort pledged, and since the work took place in the páramo). This action created opportunities for people to express values (working cooperatively, the remembrance of ancestors) and to maintain a steady supply of irrigation water to San Isidro, transforming the potential for agricultural production. The páramo had been re-evaluated as both a source of water and as a site of collaborative work. At the same time, participating in these forms of action led to many of those involved revaluing the use and significance of communal land, and re-assessing the viability of community action. In the following chapter, I explore how another kind of coordinated action on the pipeline project – work undertaken during *mingas* (collective work-parties) – similarly transforms elements of the physical environment whilst, at the same time, creating ethical value in the form of expectations, relations, and ideas about the desirability of future courses of action.



Figure 8 – A *minga* in the páramo: unearthing and replacing a length of cracked pipe.



Figure 9 – A *minga* called to replace a branch of the pipeline that ran underneath *hacienda* fields.

3

Reworking *Mingas*: Productive, Affective and Effective Action

A stream of eighty people wound its way along the path, narrow, clinging to the valley-side and leading up into the páramo. I started walking with a group who all went to *colegio* together. Wendy pulled her scarf up over her mouth, and Pacha tugged his knitted hat right down over his ears, fending off a chill breeze. Nelly and Dorila made fun of Darío Wilson for bringing along a set of panpipes: “we said we wanted music – to dance to! – not those things!” Don Kleber took his sunglasses off and eked out a tune, to the laughs and protests of everyone within earshot. We were just over halfway through our five-hour trek to the alpaca corral, where all of us would be based for the next two days – working as part of a weekend *minga*. Clouds threatened to hide what had been a piercing morning sun, but it still lit young Jeferson’s deep red poncho, Sra Alicia’s bright pink shawl, and revealed our destination up in the hills ahead. Perched on one of many steep, folded hillsides, the corral and thatched huts became visible as a sandy dot in the distance.

Scattered dogs barrelled between scores of yellow wellingtons, black boots and hundreds of legs; everyone had brought along a beast of burden, reluctantly strapped with food and firewood, clattering tools and empty sacks. They would be vital in achieving our goal. Four tons of sand, ballast and cement had to be moved from the end of the track, where it had been dumped by truck, up to two remote spots in the hills, where the pipeline was in need of repair. Normally three people would be stationed there in the páramo for a week, working on the pipeline. That weekend, there’d be scores of us, all huddling together to eat and keep warm of an evening, and sleeping on the earth floor crammed in to two small, overflowing huts. We were there to replace damaged sections of pipe, and to repair part of one of two water-capture tanks. We would be lugging the sand and cement, and also tubing, planks, shovels and fixtures to where they were needed. This meant a lot of donkeys, about fifty of them, along with almost thirty horses and a couple of llamas. José was riding

on the back of our donkey, Pepito, whose bowed and aged frame meant his rider's feet still scuffed the floor.

Our first stop came at the end of the track above Rumipungo. There were two piles of *arena y grava/gravilla* (sand and gravel). As the day wore on and the weight of our load became more acute, the exclamation, *¡gravilla grave!* (serious sand!) was shared in jest more and more often. We stopped and got our breath back, the animals milling around wherever there was space at the side of the track. We untied the sacks and awaited our instructions, whilst Milton, as president, discussed what was to be done. José stood by his father, Porfirio, who was consulted on most matters of organizing, and beside them stood Cyntia, just in her teens, and young Antonio who was still at primary school and there that weekend with his mother, tía Yulisa. They listened in to the conversation, as did Don Juan Yasig and Don Marco Llumiquinga, and to the advice from Don Marco's brother, Don Jorge Llumiquinga. The consultation concerned exactly what materials were to be delivered where, and how, and by whom.

As an experienced *ingeniero*/engineer and occasional paid-worker on the pipeline, Don Jorge was the default overseer of these large-scale, repair-work *mingas*. He said it was important to move the materials into place and get them covered again as quickly as possible – any more exposure to the rain and they'd be even harder to work with. Josselyn (daughter of Sra Nancy, community secretary) dug out the attendance lists from her back-pack, and a plan-of-action for the day was finalised. Alberto Rojas took on the job of spading sand into a queue of empty sacks – 6 spadesful each. Some, according to the register, would make repeat hikes between here and the most distant water-capture tank, a couple of mountainous miles upstream. Others, following Don Jorge's specific instructions, would help unearth and crack the lengths of concrete pipe-casing to be replaced, which had been worn out through a year's enduring the elements.

Gradually, each sack was filled, and each donkey was reloaded, ropes yanked tight around their bellies and tails. It was important to get this right, with the packs well

balanced. As the path ahead got narrower, it also became more difficult for animals to negotiate. During one *minga* a work-tired horse lost its footing and fell to its death about 50-ft below down the steep valley-side. People sympathetically bemoaned the loss of young Walter's US\$400 investment – a good deal more than the monthly minimum/standard salary of US\$240, which is likely what his construction-labourer job paid. As the loads were secured, groups of chatter and conversations faded and people set off hiking, in turn, as soon as they were ready. Our laden procession began the next part of its tiring ascent and the *minga* continued, in full flow.

How do we understand a form of activity (involving physical work, and generating particular experiences) in which 'performance and product' (Harris 2007) are interwoven, without resorting to distinct 'types' of 'value-rational' or 'affectual' action (Weber 1922: 24-5)? In this chapter, I examine two key features of *minga* practice: (i) the importance of how work is organised and orchestrated, in addition to the tangible products of physical activity, and (ii) the significance people attach to the shared social experiences of participating in collective work. Taken together, these are constitutive elements of *action* (Arendt 1958). I suggest these two elements of *mingas* overlap and occur simultaneously, and that the same can also be said of their outcomes and consequences. That is, action undertaken through *mingas* produces different kinds of –both– material and ethical value. How do questions of value influence the interactions between (and expectations placed on) those who are taking part? How do these affect participation in collective work-parties? Drawing on recent shifts in *minga* practice in San Isidro, I argue that interpreting *mingas* as a form of *action* provides us with a framework for understanding collectivity as it operates in spaces between the poles of coercion and voluntary engagement.

Product and Performance

Mingas (collective work-parties) feature in different forms of collective life across Andean regions, and tend to be interpreted variously as cultural expressions, symbols of community, or as a source of free labour for governmental development programmes (Becker 1999; Urton 1992; Gose 1994; Ortíz 1979, 1994; Latta 2011).

Different accounts have detailed the importance of *mingas* in contemporary forms of community organising, and within indigenous political action (Pallares 2002; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009, 1999; Gerber & Veuthey 2010; Poole 2009; Latta 2011; Swanson 2005).

Other approaches have addressed the ways in which collective work is central not only to the material and economic life of rural communities, but also to how people experience and enact sociability (most notably Harris 2007, and also Passes 2000; Overing 1989; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009, 2002; Jackson 1998; Ingold 2000; Corr 2010). A focus on morality has similarly examined the relationship between these two spheres, and the potential for work to shape shared values (Striffler 2007; Mayblin 2010; Zigon 2008). Durkheim (1995 [1912]) famously described ‘collective effervescence’ to explore the idea of social ‘force,’ when people experience mental, physical or emotional influences and transformations, with the result that they become more tightly bound ‘to the ideals valued by their social group’ (Shilling & Mellor 1998: 196). Durkheim focused more on ritual than on collective work (Harris 2007: 160), but the centrality of work to collectivity is no less significant: “not only does work provide the livelihood of persons, it creates modes of sociality and sustains a vital sense of what it means to coexist and cooperate with others” (Jackson 1998: 16, at Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 121). Thus we learn how, in Colombia, “the [*minga*] work day ends in celebration, not of what has been accomplished, but of what has been ascertained: the communal bond of the participants” (Ortíz 1994: 893).

In this light, the overlapping connotations of the customary English translation of *mingas* as ‘collective work-parties’ is revealing (v. Harris 2007: 145; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999: xiii; Ortíz 1994: 893). The ‘party’ of ‘work-party’ is generally understood in the sense of ‘a group of people taking part in a particular activity’, but the more common association of the word to refer to ‘a social gathering of invited guests’ is just as apt. Harris points out that in many descriptions “these work parties really are parties” (2007: 145), and adds that in her experience, “it was not only the sociability and the sense of occasion that made work parties important to people, but

also the work itself. ‘We help each other,’ people would say...” (ibid.). In trying to capture this twofold character of *mingas* in her analysis, Harris emphasises the idea that value lies ‘not only in the product’ of work, but also in its ‘performance’ (Harris 2007: 159).

This approach shifts the focus from one that deals only with the concept of ‘work’ within a ‘work-party.’ As Sutti Ortíz notes, “economists since Adam Smith have narrowed the meanings of the concept of work, focusing on what they have called ‘productive labour’ —a labour that produces commodities with exchange value—and disregarding efforts that they regard as unproductive or activities that they consider to represent leisure” (Ortíz 1994: 891). This relies on problematic assumptions regarding what counts as un/productive activity (Narotzky 1997). It also overlooks the social situation that enables, supports and generates work activities – an ‘abstraction’ that treats *work* in isolation from “the lived social relations which encompass it, and which it creates and recreates” (Harris 2007: 155). Such a move locates value specifically within the ends and outcomes of activity, rather than in the ‘actions and processes’ that constitute activity (Graeber 2011: 91). The forms of organising work, and experiences of the interactions which it involves, are critical to an understanding of its purpose and importance.

For Lambek, this means taking into consideration not only the material outcomes and effects of activity, but also the social relations and transformations that engender and derive from people’s participation in activity itself (Lambek 2013: 144, 149). These include ‘*transformations* effected in a person’ (Lambek 2013: 149) and their influence on future forms of action and interaction. Thus ‘action/*praxis* (doing something)’ generates and is considered in relation to ethical value, just as ‘material value’ is to ‘production/*poiesis* (making something)’ (Lambek 2013: 141).

Value, then, is to be considered not only in the material terms of commodities and products, but also as something generated by, and generative of, different forms of cooperation and ways of being together. Marxian thought is based in such a recognition of the twofold character of ‘production,’ whereby “work produces and

reproduces both selves and societies” (Marx & Engels 1947: 14-19, cited by Jackson 1998: 16), and “our labouring practices produce collective subjectivities, produce sociality, and ultimately produce society itself” (Hardt 1999: 89). Elaborating on the use of *mingas* in San Isidro primarily as work on the community’s irrigation pipeline, this chapter highlights the dual role of *mingas* in San Isidro – as both a practical solution (providing necessary productive labour – for the ‘product’), and as a form of action that generates social values (underscoring the importance of cooperative action – in the performance). Focusing on the experiential elements of *minga* participation highlights the space between these roles – that participants may consider how and why particular actions are important or significant, without necessarily calculating their value in terms of outputs, nor regarding those actions as particularly virtuous (but instead as enjoyable, convivial or desirable). I begin with an account of *mingas* where these dynamics were especially salient – those that took place in the páramo.



Figure 10 – Don Jorge (centre) walks past a team replacing piping during a páramo *minga*.

I. *Minga* Practice and the Pipeline Project

Páramo Mingas

The end of the first day. Bodies weary. By seven o'clock in the evening, a thick mountain darkness and onsetting cold had enveloped the hills and ducked into our huts at the corral. Don Manillo had everyone laughing again. Home from his job drilling oil in the jungle, he was sporting leather chaps and a constant smirk, smoking a cigarette most of the time. Before we eat, he pretends to faint from hunger, crying out for food in Kichwa – “*Kukayu! Kukayu!*” – much to the amusement of all. His exhaustion, he said, was such that only ‘pure methanol’ would be able to cure it.

Tying up the still-warm blanket (that acted as a saddle) into a bundle, knotting it in a dark woollen shawl against her back with the spare rope tied around her waist, Sra Pastora joined Don Norberto, and caught her hat in the breeze. They took their horses to drink out of a half-tyre trough beside the huts. The animals were as wearied as their owners. Earlier in the day, Pacha and his cousin Christian, both in their mid-teens, had been unlucky enough to be identified as young and healthy candidates for carrying sand right up to Capture-tank #1, a way up the valley. I had stopped first at Capture-tank #2, where most people were delivering their sacks of sand. Don Olmedo and Sra Pastora were unloading them into a fresh pile, whilst Josselyn sat with the register and ticked off the names of those who had delivered their load.

By the time I caught up with Pacha and Christian, they were carrying the sandbags themselves, their beast no longer able to carry them. Bracing themselves, they'd lug the weight for twenty paces or so, before collapsing again for another rest. Their donkey had earlier got stuck in a drenched, muddy section of the path. Once it had struggled free, it simply folded its legs whenever anyone tried to load its back again. By the next day, many more enervate animals were refusing to work, or simply no longer able to bear the weight asked of them. For everyone involved, the end of that first working day was extremely welcome.

Home that night was the few thatched roofs of the huts, clustered amidst wisps of fire-smoke and chilled swathes of breath. An unexpected crowd in the hills beneath the quiet black sky of bright, flocked stars. Three people volunteered by group vote to cook the evening meal had been preparing food all day. Tía Senaida (with tía Yulisa and Sra Olga Copara) stood over huge steaming pots at the fire in one of the room's smoke-blackened corners, ladling up hot bowls of potato soup (dropping a chunk of cheese into each). People perched wherever they could find space, either here in the kitchen hut, outside, or in the sleeping hut. Hearty meal-devouring and grin-laden chatter marked an end to the day's thirteen hours of work and hiking. Tomorrow we'd be starting again, urging the beasts to once more ferry building materials up from Rumipungo to the Capture-tanks. What we had hoped would be done in one day was going to take two. To make up for this, a whole other weekend would be set aside for another páramo *minga* – just seven days later.

The pipeline project had transformed *minga* practice in San Isidro. Since its construction began in 2009, widespread participation in *mingas* had been vital both to the pipeline's original completion, and to its ongoing use. *Mingas* involved physical labour contributed by representatives from member-households (people who had access to the water for use in their smallholdings), for anywhere from a few hours to a few days at a time, and they took place usually at least once a month. Though their practice had long been a recognized feature of communal life, their frequency and intensity had increased since the pipeline project began, and each event typically involved around 50-100 people.

In terms of maintaining a supply of fresh water from the páramo directly into the village, for the purpose of supporting and encouraging family-scale agriculture, *mingas* were undoubtedly 'productive.' The work required (in terms of upkeep and organizing) was extensive and significant: demanding equal, shared, physical and financial contributions from its use-members, the pipeline both depended on and generated a sense of cooperation centred around resources held in common.

Not all *mingas* took place in the páramo, and before the pipeline project came about, no *mingas* took place there. Echoing events and analysis in Chapter 2, the fact that an increasing number of *mingas* required people to travel to the páramo and work there was particularly important. It rooted contemporary action in the historical struggle for land ownership, and reaffirmed the sense that whilst the pipeline met people's needs for irrigation water, it also represented a key achievement in the ongoing effort to secure life in San Isidro.

The idea of the páramo as a 'source of life' (*fuentes de vida*) was also reinforced by spending time there as part of a *minga*. The relative abundance of water in the páramo was frequently contrasted with the scarcity of water in the village itself – a scarcity reversed by the completion of the pipeline. At the same time, there was a sense of the continual work required to maintain this reversal. During one weekend-long *minga* in the páramo, whilst resting on the slope beside the corral with some friends, 16-year old Alex Simaluisa summed up events in a sentence: “*estamos aquí, todos... para poder llevar el líquido vital para abajo a las familias de San Isidro...*” (“we’re here... we’re all here so we can keep the ‘liquid of life’ flowing down to the village and to the families of San Isidro”). *Mingas*, however, offered participants much more than merely an opportunity to exert oneself and to keep the water flowing. Whilst physically demanding, they were also social events that were often keenly anticipated.

Convivial Work, Coincident Needs and Tensions

On the second day (of the first of a series of three weekend *mingas*, held in the páramo over the course of two months), we woke from a cold-disturbed night of cramped sleep to emerge from the hut and find something completely unexpected. Overnight, a blanket of white had fallen and covered all the surrounding hills. This was the first time that many people, especially younger people, had ever seen and been amidst snow. Iván got out his mobile phone and started taking pictures: ‘I’ll put this [online] on *feisbuk*, otherwise no one will believe me!’ Heavy-set clouds blurred with the hilltops, and gradually rose as dawn took hold. We gathered tightly together

for the *asamblea* discussion, clarifying plans for the day, and wearing all the clothes we had brought with us.

Each time another two-day páramo *minga* was announced, a good deal of excitement went into preparations and planning. Anticipation of the *minga* became the main topic of conversation, and the opening question if you bumped into someone along a pathway, or walked past someone at work in a field: ‘who’s going for your family?’, ‘are you going up to the *minga* this time round, are you going again?’, ‘You are? Well, I should go too in that case – you working there, I should be working there too!’, ‘won’t you be too cold up there in *páramo*?’, ‘it will be cold, really cold, and we’ll be exhausted... *¡qué bestia!* (madness!).’

For members of the *directiva*, however, *minga* preparations were less exciting, and more demanding and time-consuming. It wasn’t only in San Isidro that *mingas* were a chore for those responsible for coordinating them, as Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009: 94) observed in the neighbouring canton of Zumbagua. Eighty-five people in the páramo would need to be fed, and sufficient and appropriate ingredients and supplies bought in advance. This often meant that on a Friday evening a few of us would jump in the back of Milton’s truck and drive into Pujilí, catching as many stallholders as we could who had stuck around after the usual trading-hours tailed off at 5pm or so.

Judging the necessary amounts had been refined and honed to an art – there was always enough food to go round, but never vast amounts of surplus. Also paid for out of member-household monthly contributions to the pipeline, and purchased in advance by the *directiva*, was a small supply of alcohol. Finding a shop willing to sell us 3 litres of *trago* became difficult when we insisted on getting a receipt for the accounts. After a spate of deaths in the country linked to bootleg *caña*, shopkeepers felt uncomfortable about being so directly traceable – at least till they felt assured that their batch was ‘safe.’ Provisioning, however, was only one part of the *directiva*’s duties as far as *mingas* were concerned. There were a range of associated

tasks, and a ‘huge amount of worries’ (*con preocupaciones de un montón*), not least keeping on top of the administrative side of things (more on this below).

The isolation of the huts at the corral transformed the experience of working in and contributing to a *minga*. In such a remote spot, everyone’s most immediate needs and interests were brought together, and means for meeting them made equivalent. Food was limited to what was made available to everyone, and to what could be carried up from the village. There was a coming together as a ‘commensual [sic] group’ (Harris 2007: 149; also Graeber 2001: 70) in the sharing of food. This developed an ‘intimacy’ beyond that associated with the more abstract accounts of ‘associational activities’ (ibid.). Such accounts describe ‘a sense of intimacy’ developing through collaborative planning and action: where ‘project-centred interaction’ leads to the ‘formation of complex group identities’ (Wibbelsman 2009: 54, citing Walzer 1994: 189). *Mingas* in the páramo involved both a sense of common purpose stemming from participation in collaborative action, and the coincidence of needs which fostered the ‘self-generating interrelatedness’ associated with *communitas* (Turner 1974, at Wibbelsman 2009: 20). Overnight stays in the páramo work-station typically involved some drinking and, when powered music was available, dancing too. Given how little space was available as accommodation – with upwards of 50 people in a single hut – there was also an undeniable, physical intimacy based on discomfort, which provoked further reactions, as described below.

During the *mingas*, there was an emphasis on humour, reliability and balancing talk with toil (as constitutive of the entire exercise). Occasionally this would cause tensions – between those conscious of the work to be done, and those softening the blows of cold and exhaustion, say, with a shot or three of pure cane alcohol in an evening.

At the start of the October páramo *minga*, earlier in the day and after the first load of materials had been delivered (to different sites along the pipeline, again according to individual names called from the register), we sat down to ‘*tonga*,’ pots of a variety of food wrapped in cloths and strips of material: toasted maize, boiled beans, potatoes, rice, tuna dishes, some still quite warm. *Tonga* would be the first meal of the day, of

the weekend, and everyone brought their own to share. After that, food was provided (funded by project contributions, purchased in advance by members of the *directiva*, as described above, and cooked by people nominated at the start of the *minga*). I sat down to eat with Sra Pastora, Juan-Carlos and a number of friends from families I hadn't seen together before. Between shared-spoon mouthfuls, there was talk of last week's snow, some degree of respect for those who had made it two weeks running (the majority of people), and jokes looking across to the project hut where two plastic 5-litre containers stood side-by-side – no one could tell which was the *trago* brought up to be shared by all 'for the cold' or 'for the dancing,' and which was gasoline to power the newly fixed generator. Tasting what was presented to me as the former, indeed 'for the dancing,' I'm still not sure.

That night a handful of folk made the most of the party ingredients that were to hand – which meant some unavoidable disturbance to others trying to sleep³³. People were generally tolerant of this and not put off by it. Still, a 'matter of urgency' was repeatedly stated during the early-morning assembly-meetings. This was the building of another sleeping-hut to provide more (and more substantial, spacious) accommodation for "everyone" during such large-scale weekend-long páramo *mingas* (this house was completed a month later). The call was made in terms of it not being just, nor fair, that some people might have to walk down the hillside to a far less-used hut: everyone here working together should be accommodated together too. Managing people's impressions and experiences of the *minga* was a vital part of ensuring they could continue to happen, a form of 'affective action' in itself: "the dangers to the convivial sociality prove to be the very forces through which it is created, and these are as much the affective as the structural conditions of its existence... these matters of affect require constant work, vigilance, and even suffering to maintain" (Overing & Passes 2000: 24).

³³ At a subsequent assembly-meeting, Don Jorge, the default manager of the pipeline (given his expertise) expressed concern that the balance between conviviality and acting with *responsabilidad*/responsibility had swung too far in favour of the former. He publicly reprimanded the recently-elected community-president Milton (aged 26, Don Jorge is in his 50s), to which Milton asked for – everyone's – forgiveness (for his 'human weaknesses'). He added that it would not happen again (at least not to the same extent), and that he hoped no one (neither Don Jorge nor those at the party) would feel put off from future trips.



Figure 11 – Building another *casita*/hut for accommodation during a páramo *minga*.

Arendt insists upon the distinction between *labour* – especially collective labour – and *action*. Labour is anonymous, whereas action supports and encourages people in establishing an individual, recognizable identity for themselves (Arendt 1958: 213). Whilst action is typified by (indeed, is only possible through) interaction and intersubjectivity, she notes that labour might also ‘bring people together’ and that any number of individuals may ‘labour together as though they were one’ (Arendt 1958: 213). Thus labour and togetherness might be found in the same event. However, the argument runs, the togetherness of collective *labour* is at the cost of people’s ability to ‘disclose their identity,’ a disclosure which is only possible through *action*. For Arendt, the ‘social value’ of labouring together is compared to simply the ‘additional pleasure’ of eating or drinking in company (Arendt 1958: 213). Since the anonymity of labour requires the ‘loss of all awareness of individuality,’ this ‘social value’ is reduced to being a ‘somatic’ experience and of little importance (Arendt 1958: 214). Whilst this seems to downplay these often highly enjoyable ‘somatic’ experiences, it does also emphasise an important reason for framing *mingas* as *action*: the affective consequences of action provoke reflection

on the context of the activity in question, and on the interpersonal relations which constitute the collective undertaking itself. For Lambek it is in ‘doing’ (action) that we ‘acknowledge each other’ and affirm relationships (Lambek 2013: 155).

As the discussion about accommodation during *mingas*, above, and the tensions surrounding correct social behaviour during these events both suggest, these processes of implication and reflection form an important part of *minga* practice. In her analysis of contemporary ritual practice within indigenous communities in and around Otavalo, Michelle Wibbelsman pursues a parallel line of argument linking the ‘spontaneous negotiation’ required in shared productive action, with processes of judgement (how participants understand the actions they are undertaking). She draws on Bamberg (1983) to emphasise just how ‘interwoven’ these strands of action can be, where ‘successive involvement’ in particular forms of collective work brings together “the activity of establishing and elaborating interpersonal relationships (intimacy) and the affective processes of social appraisal (shared understanding)” (Wibbelsman 2005: 155-6). The result is that those involved become more acutely aware of their mutual implication in both the work/action itself, and in the network of relations that make it possible and enjoyable.

More *Mingas*: familial, localised and *nombrados*

Hiking up to the *páramo* hills en masse like this, to work for the weekend on pipeline maintenance and project upkeep, is only one example of what was referred to as a *minga* in San Isidro. The location, purpose and participants vary – though the majority were linked to the pipeline in one way or another. There was, however, a clear distinction between those that were explicitly ‘for the community’, and those with a more specific focus.

In the latter category, there were days like the Wednesday I went with tía Yulisa and her friend in a hired truck to the MIDUVI storehouse in nearby San Antonio – to collect building materials supplied by the Ministry of Housing (MIDUVI: *Ministerio de Desarrollo Urbano y Vivienda Ecuador, bono de la vivienda, casas entregadas*,

obras realizadas). Recognised as a low-income applicant to the Ministry, Yulisa was entitled to government assistance (free materials) in the building of a basic, new house to the standard 4-room, 6mx6m single-storey design. It had been tricky, finding a day when there were friends around to help, the storehouse was open, there was money to pay the driver, it wasn't raining, and the builder was around at home too.

Yulisa would usually be working in her fields, partitioned from the rest of her father's original *huasipungo* plot, or otherwise looking for part-time paid-work in and around San Isidro itself (travelling away wasn't an option since two of her three children were at the village primary school). Most recently, this had involved working as a labourer on the construction of Virgilio and Rocío's grand, new three-storey house right by the village square, beside the chapel³⁴. Another construction labourer had recommended a friend as a driver for the day's task. The truck coming back from San Antonio could only ferry us so far, though: the rest of the way we lugged the roofing sheets, window frames and panes, bolts and screws, up the hill by hand, along with the MIDUVI-branded tile for display near the front door. Out of date by a year, it bore simply the multi-coloured MIDUVI logo and, in clear black text beneath it, '2010.' A builder had been hired to help with the construction itself (which was on the site immediately beside their current one-room house).

Similarly localized, though this time with work that focused on the pipeline, one Saturday the residents from *este lado* (this side) came together to fix a branch of the pipeline used exclusively by our nine houses. 'This side' of San Isidro referred to a cluster of homes on the hill that rises just south of the village square. The slope marked an unofficial boundary, before the lands and fields became part of neighbouring [Santa Rosa de] Cochaloma. Only those residents who used that branch of the pipeline were responsible for maintaining it, and word had gone round the day before, passed from house to house by a designated *vocal*/spokesperson visiting everyone who needed to know. That day there were 11 of us working, aiming for a

³⁴ Rocío was one of Sra Luz and Don Rocendo's daughters, and lived with her family on a plot that had been carved out of her mother's land. She worked for an NGO in Pujilí, whilst Virgilio worked in a catering job in the Amazonian oil industry.

swift job. Unearth the leaking section. Saw out the fissured segment. Replace it with new piping, and re-bury. As things got underway, a rainbowing arc of pressurized spray soaked those who took it turns to hack through the old pipe.

One of them was tío Leonel, a secondary-school teacher during the week (and frequently a lively master of ceremonies at parties). He took a lead in proceedings: directing the work, cutting and moulding pipes, lighting branches gathered by cousins Doris and Myriam under the lengths of grey plastic to do so. Reseal the section. Beside him Ubaldo Rojas, back for a week from his job drilling oil near Coca in the jungle. He got equally drenched. It turned out there must be another leak somewhere since the tap further down the hill, even after our fix, was still running dry. Cue much more digging to locate the culprit. More hours required than anticipated. It got to nearly 1pm after an early start to the day – right when the equatorial, Andean sun was almost directly over-head, unforgiving. Though it tried to burn through our clothes, it did help dry out the sodden togs of those who had been soaked. Despite the delays, spirits were buoyed with jokes and humour. Leonel and Ubaldo, their clothes heavy with wet, collapsed in mock-drowning. Sra Gilma Rojas' two sons chucked mud at each other, seeing if the older children there would indulge them too.

Another stray jet of water swatted Ubaldo square in his face. He grimaced in reflex to cries of 'what a mistake!' Still straddling the exhumed pipe, he retorted "yeah, a *Carnaval* mistake³⁵! You come and cut it – get soaked, then we'll know where the leak is, get soaked! Then we'll know if there's water here or not!" It was a clear day, and from our vantage point half way up the hill behind San Isidro, the *Alpamalag* valley stretched out in front of us into the distance: the strip-fields of neighbouring communities to the northern end morphing into vast, flat, uniform plantations of broccoli-for-export further south. More distant still stood the volcano *Tungurahua*, releasing a nebulous column of ash on the horizon. From there we were also looking out over the approach road to San Isidro itself, and there was intense interest in the

³⁵ In reference to the widespread, public, water-fighting games and practices that are enjoyed during *Semana Santa*.

publicly-visible movement of neighbours and *comuneros*, the flow of folk and goods and occasional vehicles, the comings and goings being played-out by these dot-creatures below us.

A truck jolted, lurched as far as it could, juddering a load of roof-sheets up the hillside. Three women got out and carried the corrugated panels up to where another MIDUVI house was being completed. Just uphill from Yulisa's own building project, she was among the trio, this time helping her neighbour out. Beside me, Gilma Rojas watched the scene and said, "look at that – such a difficult task – that's why they're not here with us... when you're building a house, everything changes – you need so much time and there's still all the work to do... and money to buy food for the builders – it's hard... And here we are at the *minga*, lucky!" Our task for the day was not going to be finished till it was finished, and no one abandoned the work till everyone was happy and convinced that the leak had been fixed. The distributing irrigation hose was finally re-attached and it was mid-afternoon (with no stop for lunch: this was to be a morning *minga*) before we headed home our separate ways, along veining paths branching off from the one track on 'this side' of the village.

There were also pipeline-related *mingas* which took place on a smaller scale, where only those selected and 'named' (*nombrados*) from the members-register were expected to attend (not everyone would find out when or where these were taking place, nor would everyone know about them – though word soon spread, since those not in attendance would then expect to be 'named' all the sooner).

One such '*nombrados*' *minga* was called to clear the canals and one of the smaller concrete holding tanks up on the slopes of the village. There were twelve names on the list, and everyone showed up, some bringing along their children. Not everyone stayed for the whole time (from 9am till about 2pm), but most people did, and each 'named' participant made sure their participation and contribution had been 'signed for' – formally recognised and recorded – before they left. On other occasions, the *nombrados* totalled just 8 or 10 people, again selected (in turn) from the complete register of member-households. These could be scheduled anytime, and often

occurred mid-week (which again meant a majority attendance by women), whilst the larger-scale *mingas* were reserved for weekends, to encourage and allow maximum participation and attendance.

Non-attendance was rare – primarily because the process of being ‘named’ involved a degree of negotiation. A handful of elected *vocales* were in charge of spreading the word, calling door-to-door to the houses in their designated area of the village. Thus, if someone was away from home, or had a genuine case for not participating (especially if they were older, or suffering ill-health, and couldn’t recruit a younger relative to take their place), they could re-schedule or re-arrange the time when they would be expected to work. Sometimes, however, the *vocales* relied on text-messages or themselves recruited willing youngsters on their way home from school to get the message out – and then such negotiations were not possible. The same process announced the *mingas* which everyone was expected to attend – unless this had been announced previously at an *asamblea* meeting. A visit from the *vocal* might update people with refined plans – telling certain people in advance to bring a particular tool for whatever work was to be completed (specifically a spade or bucket, or *azadón* (hoe), or machete or saw), and they would turn up laden appropriately.

The first time I experienced a community-wide *minga*, it felt like the whole *comunidad* had gathered on the hillside above the village, to clean out the lower of two concrete reservoirs (about 40-ft square, 10-ft deep) and the surrounding dug canals. After breakfast (potato soup) I hurriedly began putting things into a small rucksack to then head up the hill and get there on time. Rocío’s younger sister (tía Sandra) chuckled at the sight: “You don’t need to rush: you’re not the only one to be late for a *minga*! Anyway... don’t work too hard up there!” Once there, José and I inspected the covering of mud and silt deposits that layered the reservoir-bottom just over a foot deep – all to be cleared out that day.

A small army of spades and their boot-equipped owners gradually gathered, and before long the concrete structure was echoing with scrapes, grating metal edges

raked across the floor to shovel out the mud (Fig.12). A human chain passed empty buckets one way to Don Graibi balanced atop the inlet tube, beneath him Pato and others bailing out silt-laden water, heavy-full buckets passed back along the line. Don Graibi spotted me: “You’re here too, getting your hands dirty! There’s so many of us – look, hacking away! – we might not even need you... but seeing as how you’re here. Give him a spade, give him a bucket, someone! This chain... what can’t you do with a thousand hands?” Whilst the sites and objectives of different *mingas* varied, it was large-scale *mingas* like this one, working on pipeline maintenance, which had become the most frequent and visible. Their arrangement, and integration into communal life in San Isidro, was closely linked to relations with outside organisations – funding bodies, governmental departments and indigenous agencies. In the next section, I examine the role of *mingas* in the construction of the pipeline, in relation to questions of recognition from these outside institutions, and the effects these had on the demands placed on community-members.



Figure 12 – Participating in a *minga*, called to clear mud from Reservoir #1 (the closer one to San Isidro, of two in the pipeline system).

II. Free Labour for the State?

Reputation and Targets

The first two years of San Isidro's registration with CODENPE (2009-2011) saw significant change only in the community's official status – no funds, for example, had been received, nor had any extra support for community projects. CODENPE had been known to provide funding for cultural events and community-level initiatives of various kinds, and occasionally attached conditions to these funds that required labour to be provided by the beneficiary communities. It was founded as a governmental development agency in response to constitutional reforms in 1998 and to 'give Indigenous peoples a larger role in development programs in their communities' (Becker 2011b: 182). It was administered by indigenous people, and in parts of the highlands had for a while been a relatively steady source of support (Latta 2011: 168-9). The prosperous Otavaleño community of Peguche, home to around 2100 people, had received 100 million *suces* (c.US\$4000 at the time, in the year 2000) from CODENPE for the construction of cement bench seats around their stadium, in support of the Pawkar Raymi cultural event which had been founded as an annual celebration in the mid-1990s (ibid.).

A condition of this donation was that the community would provide all necessary labour for the construction. Peguche is a place where *mingas* took place on rare occasions and were typically limited to only a certain segment of the community (Latta 2011: 119). Nonetheless, to fulfil the CODENPE-funded project, a *minga* was called to complete the work, and organisers of Pawkar Raymi specifically adopted the idea of *minga* – as 'a collective labor toward a communal end' – to describe the festival itself (Latta 2011: 217).

This combination of funding and unfunded labour followed an established pattern in many parts of highland Ecuador, where "the state or an NGO can trigger the organization of a *minga* by putting up materials and expertise that the community must in turn match with their own contributions" (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 105).

Other ‘development’ agencies have taken these conditions further. As detailed in Chapter 7, in association with the World Bank, the national development project PRODEPINE often explicitly targeted communities as recipients if *mingas* and other formalised community practices would be mobilized (Andolina et al 2009: 68-9). As such, *mingas* were conceptualised as a ‘development resource,’ and often as both a requirement and an outcome of that particular programme.

Being able to mobilise *mingas* effectively could also attract outside support, even if the agencies involved were not specifically pursuing the kinds of ‘ethnodevelopment’ associated with PRODEPINE (Lucero 2003). The success of San Isidro’s application for the pipeline project is notable in itself. Whilst the outcome reflects a degree of fluency on the part of certain key members of the *directiva* – an aptitude for articulating the community’s collective efforts in ways which convince government officials of its value and longevity – at the same time the bid’s success points to the recent history of San Isidro in terms of similar ‘successes.’ On more than one occasion, in modest terms, I was told “we are well-known” – usually by those who had been directly involved in the negotiations (including Porfirio, Don Jorge, Don Adán, and Milton).

‘Well-known,’ that is, both locally and regionally within the organisations who have sponsored (smaller-scale) projects here in the past – including the government body INAR (who funded the pipeline). Within the last few years the most recognized input has come from iNGOs such as *Visión Mundial* and *HEIFER International* – though since 2008 many iNGOs have been closing their Ecuador offices (*Progreso/CIIR* among them)³⁶. Government support had slightly increased in the same period, even though relations with government offices were as prone to change as any other. Porfirio told me: “Yes, we have friends there [in INAR] – in the offices. People know us there. Less so now – some of our friends have moved on – but... our past is helping our present. A good reputation helps...” (v. Chapter 4 for more on how this ‘reputation’ was maintained).

³⁶ v. Appendix 3 for an overview of NGO support in San Isidro, from 1982 to 2000.

Mingas were particularly effective in generating this recognition, for being (considered to be) a well-organized and effective community, and for demonstrating a more secure outcome for the investment that funders may be seeking (convincing people that San Isidro is a good community to give money to). Such recognition also impacted on relations with neighbouring communities. Larger communities – especially Yacubamba – both attracted more interest from sources of outside support, but also had more internal conflicts to manage, and the potential for such conflicts and differences of interest to arise led to a lower ‘success’ rate. In the same conversation concerning San Isidro’s ‘reputation,’ Porfirio added: “Yacubamba, you’ve got more than 1000 residents [there]... and you can see, so many projects that are a waste, projects that come to nothing, projects that are not continued – if you go there, you can see milling machines now sitting out in the fields, unused, rotting...”

The continued practice of *mingas*, then, created connections and resources for use in future actions in San Isidro. The analytical perspective which criticises their use as simply providing ‘free labour’ for the state – labour which would otherwise be paid – is accurate in denouncing policies which exacerbate rural unemployment or take advantage of communities already in a position of requiring direct state support (Swanson 2005). However, it also echoes the critique of indigenous (and other social movements) for their complex, and at times seemingly contradictory, engagement with state politics (Brass 2007; Lucero 2003).

Formal or institutional engagement tends to be on the terms of those who are responsible for administering the agency or institution. Whilst divisive forays into electoral politics might alienate movement members (Becker 2011b), it is nonetheless of great importance that indigenous elected representatives are now in positions of power where they once were not (eg. the first indigenous Provincial Prefect (a form of Governor) of Cotopaxi elected in 2000 with the support of MICC [Ospina Peralta et al 2008: 2928]). Similarly, whilst the critique stands that a national government should pay those performing labour for them – effectively in their employ, in the construction of pipelines, the building of a stadium, etc. – it is also important, on a scale that can initiate significant transformations, that rural

communities such as San Isidro receive at least some material or financial support from the state.

From the perspective of Sra Luz, for example, all the grave sacrifice – physical exhaustion, mild injury – involved in creating the pipeline had been worth it. “My son Alex... it almost killed him, carrying those huge great pipes all the way up there [*“arriiba”*]... he’d come home and his shoulders were all cut up and scraped... Sometimes Alex would have to carry food – as well as the building materials – for the workers who were up there [further up] with Don Jorge...” I asked if it had been so important as to justify the *sacrificio*/sacrifice as she called it. Immediately, she replied “Oh, yes, of course... absolutely... sure – sure it was worth it... for the water. Before, it was very difficult... not much would grow. We need the water in the village – others don’t have any water and they can’t – it’s hard for them.” A small number of (more experienced) workers from San Isidro had, in fact, received a daily labourer’s wage (US\$10/day at the time) – though only for the initial, limited period of construction. The bulk of construction work, and all maintenance work since, had received no funding from INAR. Without *mingas*, the pipeline project would not have been completed, nor would it be viable without them. This relationship between the pledge of communal work, and the need for it to continue distinguishes the situation in San Isidro from other regional accounts which emphasise *mingas* as a ‘cultural practice.’

Shared Material Life

Elsewhere in highland Ecuador, we see how *mingas* are not only used differently to engage with outside organisations and agencies, but also the contrasting ways in which they relate to communal life in general. In some contexts, *mingas* are constitutive of collectivities, an idea that has forged their image in many people’s minds as the “most emblematic activity of community unity in the Ecuadorian Andes” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 89). In others settings, *mingas* are forms of action that have become strained, and perhaps even have a divisive effect on the communities concerned. Work-parties might involve the maintenance of public areas

such as churches, cemeteries, streets and sports grounds (Pallares 2002: 119), and thus generate shared goods. However, they might also benefit a community by providing construction or maintenance on shared roads and pipes, and yet at the same time be experienced as an imposition and a burden, interfering with the time available for household labour (Bourque 1997: 161).

Behind every individual's involvement lies a complex mix of motivations, forces and priorities. Depending on how community systems are administered (and their obligations enforced), some might feel coerced or threatened into participating (Lucero 2008), which further strains those relations which are required for the collective work to take place (Overing 1989). Alternatively, participation in *mingas* might reflect a different kind of activity, driven by a desire to create affective links through cooperation (Narotzky 1997: 186) or to experience or recreate a sense of collectivity. Luis Macas et al (2003: 217) describe *mingas* among Saraguro communities in Loja province as reflecting a 'strong, proud self-identity,' alongside other markers such as a shared history of struggles, or distinctive clothing.

As a particular form of labour exchange, *mingas* are frequently described as a form of practice 'rooted in peasant agriculture' which, along with agrarian festivals and small-scale rural institutions in Ecuador, is gradually 'disappearing' (Korovkin 2001: 40; Korovkin 1997; Guerrero 1983). There is a tendency to consider them as 'lost traditions', something static which has been, and continues to be, destroyed by 'the capitalist transformation of Andean agriculture' (Korovkin 2001: 40; Sylva 1986). From this perspective, *mingas* represent a form of 'traditional practice' that continues in spite of processes of urbanisation (Swanson 2005: 215): an element of 'traditional culture' that, like so many others, has been 'fractured and devoured' by the forces of conquest colonialism and late capitalism (Weismantel 2006: 80). As such, *mingas* are described in some places as having become 'rare' (Latta 2011: 209) due to a widely observed and seemingly unhindered rural exodus, another victim of the increased fragmentation of rural communities.

However, in places where *mingas* do remain a formative feature in collective life,

they are said to ‘testify to a shared material life’ among increasingly diverse communities, playing a particularly important role for returning migrant workers keen to maintain connections with their natal home (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 101). This forms a ‘joint base’ or ‘human-made commons’ in the broadest sense, which conceives of a base as a community’s “lasting resources (such as land and water), produced things, ideational constructs such as knowledge, technology, laws, practices, skills and customs” (Gudeman 2001: 7, at Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 101).

Even in such circumstances, though, where the ongoing use and existence of *mingas* is recognised as directly counteracting processes of fragmentation, the ‘fragility’ of *minga* practice is often also emphasised. This is because the failure of community leaders to command sufficient authority to coordinate *mingas* (and thus provide an arena for these connections to be maintained) can threaten the very existence of the communities concerned (Becker 1999: 555). Again, *mingas* appear destined to disappear. If not doomed to be eroded by various outside forces, then likely to fall foul of competing designs and desires.

Fragility

There are further echoes here of the arguments above which found fault with *minga* practice – approaches that placed undue emphasis on only one aspect of *mingas*, linked to financial commitment, the nature of relations with State, or constructed narratives of social change and the role of community work within them (Brass 2007; Lucero 2003; Redclift 1975). An emphasis on their ‘fragility,’ as well as hinting at problematic ideas of cultural change as ‘loss,’ also suggests that *mingas* are thought of *only* as a cultural practice. Reflecting experiences elsewhere (eg. Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 101; Latta 2011: 207), however, *mingas* in San Isidro are recognised as *also* being a particularly effective means of pursuing collective interests – of working on a scale beyond the capabilities of any one individual or family.

It is not that *mingas* are ‘fragile’ because they are some sort of relic from the past

being ‘lost,’ nor that people are simply losing interest in them in favour of different forms of work, activity or pleasure. *Mingas* depend upon there being a purpose to which they can be put. It is not the practice by itself that is losing significance in rural areas – it is all the manifold actions, projects and interactions which would require, facilitate, encourage or in turn depend on people working cooperatively in *mingas*. In San Isidro, the pipeline project – through the demands of work it placed on its members – had created new purposes for *minga* practice, and had thus supported its continuation.

As we have seen, the ‘purposes’ of *minga* practice do not necessarily emerge from the flows of everyday life – they might be designed and imposed by outside agencies. This dynamic has a distant heritage: “Godelier argued that the Inka state drew on an earlier form of reciprocal and communal work in order to organise new relations of production and mask the oppression and domination on which they were based (Godelier 1977: 68)” (Harris 2007: 155). The argument implies that when *mingas* (or their equivalent) were imposed by the state, or became necessary in order for communities to fulfil their obligations toward the state, then they changed in character from being primarily a social encounter to being one that resulted from coercion and need. No doubt these shifts altered how those involved felt about their participation in *mingas*, something that had become enforced by the threat of violence. It would seem too hasty to assume that they lost all social significance in the transformation, though (ibid.).

At the same time, having to meet tribute demands of the state and thus ‘having’ to engage in *mingas* would not only have created sufficient produce to meet those tribute demands – there would still have been the experience of taking part in *mingas*, as well as any produce that was surplus to what went for tribute. Similarly, as Harris notes, approaches similar to that of Godelier assume “that values and institutions which had served more egalitarian functions in the past remained operative through some process of inertia, and the exploited peasants were unable to understand the fundamental change that had taken place” (Harris 2007: 155).

There is a parallel here with arguments which suggest that since the organisation of *mingas* is tightly controlled, they do not straightforwardly reflect cooperative efforts (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 106-7). However, it does not necessarily follow that individuals cannot have their own reasons for participating. In the case of the pipeline project, if a household did not want to feel coerced into working at regular *mingas*, they could opt out of the project, and be relieved of those duties. The vast majority of people were not participating only because they were expected to and because someone was keeping attendance – they also benefited from the ‘produce’ of the *minga* (access to irrigation water), to say nothing of the experiential value that different people attached to taking part in *mingas*. Personal motivations behind participation, and administrative channels to ensure it, were as numerous as the participants themselves.

III. Equivalence, Participation and a Special Domain of Value

Participation

Attendance at *mingas* was tracked and counted, and member-households of the pipeline would be fined for each *minga* they missed (on a sliding scale: the first offence in any given year: US\$2, the second US\$5, the third US\$10 – after which their non-participation would be raised in a meeting and a decision made on how to proceed). Attendance at, or participation in, a *minga* was also about presence. Though someone might be recognised as working especially hard (*trabajar duro*) during a *minga*, in advance of the event attendance was not described as work but usually in terms of movement or attendance: going to (*voy a la minga*), being at (*que bien, estás aquí*), or being *parte de* (part of) the *minga*. When amassed, this presence could also have other implications – there were times when the presence of a large number of community residents all working together on particular areas of land could re-assert claims to land, as happened the day after the conflict with the hacienda-owner, for example (described further in Chapter 5).

The issue of ‘obligation’ and how participation in *mingas* should be administered involved lengthy meetings, and lots of lists. It was important that no one felt ‘obliged’ to do anything (for the *comunidad*) – a sentiment repeated in meetings, and in conversations – and that, at least in theory, people met their communal commitments by showing *voluntad*/goodwill, rather than as a result of being forced (*obligados*) to do anything. The heavy bureaucratic workload that went with *mingas* suggested that ensuring mass participation in *mingas* involved more than goodwill alone and, as elsewhere, goodwill tends to operate “within the frame of enduring relations of mutual obligation” (Wibbelsman 2009: 122). The close monitoring of *minga* participation meant that the ‘mutuality’ of that ‘obligation’ was spread across all member-households.

The idea of (collectively shared and enacted) goodwill did occur in more everyday settings and conversations, however. Early one afternoon I was coming back from Iván’s house (he had been laid up resting his injured leg after a machete accident clearing some bushes) and passed Don Adán home from *el Oriente*, working with relatives and friends. His reinforced yellow boots and the embroidered pockets of his jeans bore the logo of his petrol-company employers (ENI Petrex Drilling). Three generations of his family were weeding a field of potatoes in the afternoon sun, the youngest his 9-month old great-nephew. He asked if I would be at the *minga* that had been planned, which was to take place in the páramo, and he joked that I shouldn’t miss the opportunity: “No *mingas* in your country! I’ve heard that. That [there]... everyone [is] just looking out for themselves (*individualmente*), is that how it is? So... those who have got money, they’re ok, and there are those who don’t have [money/enough], and they have to struggle, right? The two are separate, they don’t help each other, right? No neighbours, no *voluntad*?”

Keeping records, managing attendance registers, producing attendance lists and subsequent annual reports – all were tasks that fell to the *directiva* and, ultimately, to the community secretary, elected by open-consensus along with the other members of the *directiva* at biennial community elections (at which events these *minga* records were reviewed by all community-members, giving people the chance to publicly

dispute their own attendance records and, if necessary, have them officially corrected). Eighty-five names were on the list of member-households when the pipeline began. In its first year of operation, the pipeline had been relatively successful in terms of fielding the required amount of work in *mingas*. A couple of households had run up relatively small debts through absence, but were paying them back (by paying an extra US\$2/month to the system).

There were complaints that the *minga* schedule had increased too much, and that the demands were too great to meet even the minimum requirements of keeping the pipeline functioning. This was especially true when work in the páramo was required and could take up two full consecutive days – which could interfere with other work commitments, or be difficult for families with very young children. For the allocated weeks of *en turno* work (Chapter 2), it was possible to pay someone else to work in your place, but this was discouraged for *mingas*. Exceptions were made rarely, and then usually only for páramo *mingas*. One weekend, cousin Marisol let slip that she was there as a substitute. Lost in conversation with her friends during a roll-call, there was a conspicuously long delay after somebody's name had been read out. Marisol suddenly whispered her neighbour, “who am I here for again? I keep forgetting who I am [answering for] this weekend!”

There had been *mingas* in the past, but they were now held more regularly than ever before. Re-focusing *minga* practice onto the pipeline project had also brought about other changes. In past years, irrigation relied on a series of *acequias* (smaller canals and ditches), and *mingas* would be called to clean them and maintain them. They were more closely linked to specific houses or areas of the village, however, and so would usually involve fewer people. Any work that was required in building or maintaining the school buildings would have relied on a community-wide *minga* in the past (and continued to do so). Other larger *mingas* would have involved different kinds of work: repairing flood-damage to the road that came into the square, or rebuilding sections of the footpaths and animal tracks that led up to the high pastures near La Playa.

In the past, then, most *mingas* were localised, which could cause a conflict of interests (when people disputed the priority given to the repair of one path rather than another, say). The pipeline, by contrast, made demands only of people who had agreed in advance to participate, and who benefited directly from it. This common interest in the outcomes of *mingas* had facilitated participation – there was a lot less convincing to do by those organising them. The increased frequency (and technical/planning demands) of *mingas* had knock-on effects: the paperwork involved was more extensive than ever.

Lists

In these established forms of management, Colloredo-Mansfeld finds significant factors that count against readings of *mingas* as ‘simply’ collective enterprises and expressions. Instead, he suggests it is misleadingly easy, and therefore inaccurate, to romanticize their constitutive or cooperative characteristics: “The collective, unpaid labor mobilized in a minga is too tightly pledged to the construction of desired services, too carefully tracked by households, and too systematically monitored by community authority to be glibly described as a voluntary, cooperative effort” (Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009: 17). Central to this ‘systematic monitoring’ are lists of various kinds, just as in San Isidro. It is not just the fact that some kind of administrative system is in place which questions the degree of ‘voluntary cooperation,’ however. Colloredo-Mansfeld points out that, undeniably, people do come together to work on a shared project, and perhaps make personal sacrifices for the good of community infrastructure, taking pride in their accomplishments (ibid.). Yet, making all this ‘go’ is not simply a collective will or desire, but the intentional work of those keeping the lists: “if communities create lists; the lists themselves are the hidden ligaments of community bonds” (ibid.).

These lists count points, single marks that tally participation and are thus said to reduce each individual worker to a ‘generalized resident’ by ‘stripping away individual uniqueness’ (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 105). This creates a ‘special domain of value’ that deals with these ‘generalized’ contributions – downplaying the

differential skills, characteristics or preferences of everyone in attendance, in the hope that this reduces conflicting interests (ibid.). If everyone counts only as a 'point,' then anyone's individual objection to the purpose of a proposed *minga* also only counts equally to someone else's conflicting preference. Whilst it is important to emphasise how *mingas* do not reflect some kind of 'socialist utopia' as 'imagined by some left-wing intellectuals' (Harris 2007: 147) and that they instead rely on a degree of monitoring and negotiation, I suggest that the impact of these 'generalizing' lists in San Isidro does not so completely 'strip away' the particularity of individual contributions.

Equivalence

Recognising the power of lists can go so far that the importance of the *minga* as a social event is downplayed or overlooked. The monitoring, the lists, the structure: all might be necessary for *mingas* to take place, but they do not determine the experience of taking part in those *mingas*, nor are they enough by themselves to ensure that *mingas* do take place. In terms of the experiences, as I have pointed out, some people worked with clear flair, others made jokes, or shared in conversations. In fact, far from 'stripping away uniqueness' *mingas* were often an arena where individual personalities were revealed rather than diminished – especially in the páramo where living quarters were so cramped. Even though tasks were prescribed, you might still stop to help someone re-tie the load on their donkey, or lend someone a dry item of clothing (those lucky enough to be carrying spares), or join in the drinking and the dancing of an evening, or give someone your washed cutlery and plate as soon as you had finished eating because theirs had been lost or forgotten. Such micro exchanges were important, especially when everyone's immediate living needs had been made equivalent by the demands of the location.

It is this importance – the value of such interpersonal acts – that prevents us from seeing those taking part as 'generalized.' Such acts reveal the identity of whoever performs them. In this sense, these kinds of acts involve the 'disclosure of the self' that Arendt maintains is definitive of *action* (whereas situations of *labour* would not

typically encourage or allow such conspicuous activity). This is also the realm of Lambek's performative acts, whose value he argues is definitively not equivalent, since one promise or apology (or here: a momentary act of kindness) is not substitutable for another (Lambek 2013: 149). Whilst a minor act of generosity might set in motion connections of reciprocity, in a collective setting such as a *minga* it also has other consequences, and therefore generates other kinds of value. The unforeseen consequences of such *action* are part of what is affirmed during *mingas* – affirmation of the use and importance of collective work – which in turn shape people's expectations of each other. Consequences are, then, 'values' in the sense that they shape motivations for future actions, and are generated by shared experiences.

For Overing (1989), this link between activity and relationality is one that is creatively used and re-used. In discussing the 'aesthetics of production,' she examines the links between the daily achievement of community and the work that goes into its maintenance. Whilst her analysis focuses on creativity and aesthetic practices, it emphasises how such activity and people's judgment of it are not always separate from its 'use.' In this light, the 'social' is not the 'constraint' of a collectivity (nor of individuals living within it), but refers to the very processes that constitute and enable work and community (Overing 1989: 160³⁷). For Overing, 'production' itself is often 'erroneously' divided between accumulation and the exploitation of resources on one hand, and the generation of social comfort and the ability to continue working (together) on the other (Overing 1989: 159; 172). *Mingas* in many places (Harris 2007; Ortíz 1979, 1994) are forms of activity where these divisions break down, and where both the 'accumulative' and the 'generative' aspects of action are combined, and both reinforce each other. In San Isidro, we have seen how *mingas* make demands of people, are closely monitored, and could thus be seen as exerting a 'constraining' influence but, at the same time, they have expanded in recent years and have been 'enabling' – allowing communal projects to extend in

³⁷ Also based on fieldwork in lowland South America, Passes makes a similar case for the 'productive process' as being incomplete without 'social living' and 'sociability:' "The more one can interrelate in a friendly manner with one's co-workers, and chat, joke, laugh and, thus, relax while working... then the more the experience seems to be enjoyed and valued... [for The Pa'ikwené] 'work' and 'social life' were not regarded as discrete [but] as having the ability directly to re-create the sense and state of sociability itself" (Passes 2000: 98).

scale, and deepening processes of reflection and evaluation concerning the desirability of collective action itself.

IV. Conclusion: Subsistence and Affirmation

Along with assembly-meetings (Chapter 5) and the week-long stints of ‘in turn’ work stationed in the páramo (Chapter 2), *mingas* combined many elements of what continued to constitute communal life in San Isidro. Their frequency and duration have increased to match the demands of maintenance work required on the pipeline project. *Mingas* taking place in the páramo have also created social events that foster a sense of intimacy and ‘spontaneous negotiation’ (Wibbelsman 2009: 155), whilst at the same time prompting processes of reflection and ‘judgment’ (ibid.) that have impacted on the reputation and recognition of San Isidro. It was through their requirements of physical, temporal and social investment that *mingas* played an increasingly important part in sustaining collaborative action at the community-level. Whilst there remained a tension between fostering and encouraging participation on the one hand, and the conflicting demands and priorities of family life and economic concerns on the other, the combined aspects of *mingas* as social event, and as perfunctory (maintenance) exercise, has perpetuated their practice.

The question of how best to interpret such a form of activity (involving physical work, and generating particular experiences) – in which ‘performance and product’ are interwoven – depends on whether, or how, those divisions are formulated and understood. Lambek ‘adds action to work’ to account for the contrasting ways in which material value and ethical value is generated and circulated (Lambek 2013: 144). By ‘action’ he refers to ‘acts’ – specifically to ‘performative acts’ – whose value lies in “what, whom, and how they acknowledge or affirm, in acts as the means by which we acknowledge each other” (Lambek 2013: 155). This is to distinguish between ‘the activities of action (doing) and production (making)’ even if ‘the distinction between making and doing is not always obvious’ (Lambek 2013: 141, 145). As we have seen, *mingas* are forms of coordinated activity which both ‘acknowledge and affirm’ and which are, at the same time, ‘productive.’ The ethical

value of a performative act is here matched by the cumulative, experiential value of action (Lambek 2013: 149). *Mingas*, then, generate both material and ethical value, and are constituted by action which is not only productive, but also affective. For Overing (1989: 160), however, ‘production’ itself is understood as the twofold combination of subsistence (work to meet survival needs) and affirmation (the ‘achievement of community’). *Minga* practice in San Isidro similarly brought together conviviality with efforts to further particular projects.

Combining elements of the approaches of Lambek and Overing, Harris suggests that to satisfactorily understand the importance of shared work (and the significance attached to the social experiences of taking part in *mingas*) requires a ‘broader understanding of value’ (Harris 2007: 159). This means paying attention not only to the ‘objects’ of production, but also to conviviality and to what she calls the ‘constitutive’ aspects of *mingas* (ibid.): shared work as expressing ethical value, and as the enactment of “a commitment to collective and cooperative labour” (Harris 2007: 146). Other ‘constitutive’ qualities are ‘celebratory’ – of notions of collective identity, and of the potential for coordinated manual work to meet subsistence needs (Harris 2007: 144, 159). However, Overing and Harris both appear to have in mind *mingas* that directly contribute to the subsistence livelihoods of everyone involved and, as such, the *material* value of the work is taken as read (since it is a case of survival, of perpetuating life).

This is in contrast to the situation in San Isidro, where *mingas* are undertaken by different people for different reasons. Residents who depend financially on the agricultural produce they can grow and sell are likely to place more emphasis on the ‘productive’ benefits of the pipeline project, whilst a migrant worker returning home for a week, say, might (equally) be keen to share in the ‘affective’ exchanges offered by *mingas* as social events (this is one of the key issues examined in the following chapter). What participants share is a relationship with an administrative system that enables and governs the ongoing practice of *mingas* – and, thus far, has done so effectively – through a series of lists, accounts and community meetings. *Mingas*

emerge out of the coordination of people feeling variously drawn, motivated, coerced, or compelled to participate to their practice.

Framing *mingas* as action also enables us to consider the ways in which action is not only concerned with specific goals, but involves outcomes that are uncertain, or ‘boundless’ (Arendt 1958: 190). *Mingas* create different kinds of ethical value in the form of ideas about the legitimacy and desirability of different courses of action – they also shape expectations formed in relationships between those taking part (Lambek 2013: 149; Graeber 2011: 10). We have seen how *mingas* achieve certain ends and enable action on a scale beyond that of any one family, and also that this action depends upon and reaffirms ideas about ‘goodness’ within relationships and collectivity (Ortner 1984: 152). Participation in *mingas* generates experiences that people use to “give value and meaning” to their activities (Harris 2007: 156), through collective action that is as much about the affective as it is about the productive – reaffirming the importance of both the products and the performance of shared work.



Figure 13 – Assembly/planning meeting on the second, snowy morning of a two-day páramo *minga*.

4

Regular Remigrations: Liminal Livelihoods and Temporality

In 1982, Raúl Allauca attended a recruitment fair held in Pujilí, the nearest small market-town to San Isidro. He got a job with a French company and, for the following nine years, spent most of his time away from his wife, family and friends – either working away³⁸ in the Amazon jungle of the Eastern lowlands (*el Oriente*), or making the journey there and home again. This could take days at a time, travelling by a rugged network of buses, dug-out canoes and treks through the jungle. Sometimes he'd be away for up to two months, and the work itself was physically demanding: “*all that time to get there... and then, walking and walking through the jungle – it was endless! – cutting our way through, taking photos for the company. We'd be there first out of anyone – only after we'd been there walking would they maybe come in and start drilling*”.

This was the world of oil prospecting, and Raúl's were some of the hands on its invasive frontline. Early, escalating cuts of a burgeoning thirst. Now a national industry and primary source of government revenue, its unfinished work is by turns lucrative and destructive (Sawyer 2004; High 2007), and its seared, polluted legacy contested openly in the courts (Acosta 2013). Even though Ecuador's ‘oil boom’ is said to have started in the early 1970s³⁹, Raúl was one of the first people from San Isidro to take up a job with an oil company. These early, migratory steps in (and from) *el Oriente* were to beat a path that many of Raúl's friends, relatives and *compañeros* would go on to follow. By the time of my fieldwork, a majority of

³⁸ The English word ‘away’ is repeated here to echo common reference to work in *el Oriente* as something that took place *allá* (literally “over there”, though typically drawn-out and emphasised, accompanied with a nod or gesture suggesting a great distance of an indeterminate distance) or *afuera* (lit. “outside” or “on the outskirts”, also usually emphasised and exaggerated in similar ways).

³⁹ The ‘oil boom’ is often dated approximately to 1972–1992 (Waters 1997; El Comercio 2012a/b; Lauderbaugh 2012; Pineo 1996; Burbach 2007). “Ecuador is one of Latin America's largest oil exporters, with net oil exports estimated at 285,000 barrels per day (bbl/d) in 2010. The oil sector accounts for about 50 percent of Ecuador's export earnings and about one-third of all tax revenues” (EIA 2012).

households engaged in labour migration in San Isidro were home to someone (usually a father or son aged 18-55⁴⁰) who worked for *los petroleros* (oil companies).

This chapter looks at the impact and negotiation of regular, migratory labour practices among a significant number of San Isidro residents. Moving beyond analyses of the composition of livelihoods as a balance between necessity and strategy, I argue that a focus on experiences of time – particularly in relation to the ‘near future’ (Guyer 2007) – is central to understanding the relationship between labour migration and the continuation of collective action within the community. The latter – the realm of coordinated, intentional action – engages with, and within, a timescale that sits between immediate imperatives on one hand, and the unobtainable promise of long-term economic horizons on the other.

The Near Future

Guyer argues that the ‘temporal frame’ of the ‘near future’ covers and applies to action and events which occur at points along a temporal scale between the present and the distant future. It is the “reach of thought and imagination, of planning and hoping, of tracing out mutual influences, of engaging in struggles for specific goals... of the process of implicating oneself in the ongoing life of the social and material world” – and it has undergone a ‘strange evacuation’ (Guyer 2007: 409). In Friedman’s reading, the ‘near future’ is the realm of ‘intentional action and its consequences’ (Friedman 2007: 426). In dominating spheres of discourse, among them evangelical Christianity and, especially, the economic world of ‘monetarism’ (what others have called neoliberalism), this ‘middle’ temporal range has ‘disappeared,’ replaced by a combination of ‘fantasy futurism and enforced presentism’ (Guyer 2007: 410; Friedman 2007: 426).

For Guyer, the temporal arena of planning, hoping and struggling has been superseded by a combination of ‘responses to immediate situations’ and an

⁴⁰ 76 of the 92 households in San Isidro in 2011 had at least one member who regularly travelled away from the village or region in order to take up paid employment. Of these 76 households, 39 were home to at least one person who worked in the oil industry – a total of 46 workers.

‘orientation toward the very long-term future horizon’ (Guyer 2007: 409). Whilst labour is limited to present needs both in its purposes and products (Arendt 1958: 99), *action* takes place directly by people ‘implicating themselves in ongoing life,’ amidst ‘hoping and tracing mutual influences,’ and it is *action* that generates consequences (Lambek 2013). I suggest that action associated with the pipeline in San Isidro – especially *mingas* – not only generates experiential value through conviviality (Chapter 3) but also creates spaces for people to ‘repopulate’ the near future. In Guyer’s terms, this is to ‘inhabit’ that timeframe with other forms of action and their consequences. These spaces are ‘not alternative or utopian’ but are instead best thought of as ‘reconfigurations’ of elements and resources that are both familiar and liminal (Guyer 2007: 416)⁴¹.

In what follows I begin by outlining the specific arrangements of labour migration practices that people pursue in, and away from, San Isidro. Drawing on various accounts from migrants, these practices are considered in relation to other forms of work and employment, and contrasted with the economic arrangements that people commit to and adopt in neighbouring communities. Particular emphasis is given to the periodic spells of presence and absence that regular patterns of migration create, and their effect on family life, and on conditions of liminality. Placing contemporary migration routes in the national context draws contrasts between the temporal framing of work at the national, and local levels. It also highlights how community members take steps to meet immediate imperatives whilst also taking action to secure communal life in San Isidro itself, into the near future, and beyond.

⁴¹ In reference to Guyer’s idea of ‘inhabiting,’ I have chosen to pursue the notion of ‘repopulating’ the near future because it reflects attempts in San Isidro to use collective action as a way to ensure that generations of children and grand-children will be able continue such action. Ringel (2012) describes anarchist practices in post-industrial German cities as ‘reclaiming’ or ‘re-appropriating’ the near future, representing ‘new political and conceptual hopes’ and ‘alternative modes of critical thought’ (Miyazki 2004). In San Isidro, however, as we shall see, the arrangement of labour migration means that collective action both depends on and cuts against work in the dominant timeframes of the immediate and the distant or unobtainable.

I. "This community survives on oil money..."

Patterns of Presence

As detailed in the Introduction to this thesis, 62% of people who travelled away from San Isidro for work were employed in the oil industry. Depending on skill-levels, education and experience, people worked in a range of jobs with *los petroleros*, including kitchen porter, mechanic, chef or drill-operator. Crucially, nearly all of these jobs reflected significant changes to the structure of oil industry jobs that had been introduced and routinized since Raúl Allauca's initial explorative posts – which he described as 'a different era, a very different time'. These changes created regular shifts, and thus altered the conditions that both constrain and affect how workers spend their time.

Current practice saw oil companies arrange flights to take employees between Quito and Coca⁴². From there, and depending on the rig, the team of workers would often be helicoptered⁴³ in to the drilling site itself. This happened at the start and end of every shift, shifts that had been standardised to a '14-7' pattern: a cycle of two weeks at work followed by one week back at home. Though the basis and security of many such jobs were becoming increasingly precarious (contracts no longer being renewed, or only temporary contracts being offered to new recruits⁴⁴), most oil workers and their families in San Isidro arranged their lives around these recurrent

⁴² The town is formally known as Puerto Francisco de Orellana, the capital of Orellana province, which borders Peru to the East. Both town and province are christened after Francisco de Orellana, the Spanish *conquistador* who in the 1540s declared the river his expedition navigated down should also take his name, before the Amazon myth was adopted by cartographers (Smith 1990).

⁴³ From the perspective of workers such as Don Manillo, this mode of transport was a vast improvement – a lot faster than going by canoe and trekking. For many environmental groups, however, the use of helicopters was destructive and a tool of 'greenwash' for the oil companies: whilst they claimed this meant less environment destruction because fewer roads had to be built in the jungle, environmental groups pointed out that a primary consequence of this was that previously inaccessible and untouched areas of jungle were now accessible and subject to the same exploitation and degradation as areas that already had been drilled (DW 2013; Amazon Watch 2011).

⁴⁴ Whilst the term *precariousness* or *precarity* can be used to refer to different states of instability, uncertainty and marginalisation, it is used here in reference to the increasing precariousness of labour: the selling of labour power in the absence of previously recognised citizenship, or worker, rights, as the result of deliberate 'precarization' policies 'conducted by the operators of labour markets (Bauman 2000: 163; O'Neill 2013).

cycles.

Since what might be commonly understood as ‘labour migration’ was effectively taking place again and again, and in light of these periodic spells of absence/presence, I use the shorthand term ‘regular remigrations’ to refer to these movements and processes. They were a familiar and formative ingredient in the pursuit of making a living, and making a life, in San Isidro. These rhythmic interruptions punctuated the lives of both those who travelled, and those who did not – and the resources generated by this work also contributed to increasing divisions and disparities among San Isidro residents.

The division between ‘work’ and ‘home’ was pronounced, and yet the regularity of work shifts meant the patterns of presence/absence had been incorporated into everyday arrangements. This had negative consequences, but did not create (nor depend on) the severe ‘bifurcation’ of values and livelihoods (Meisch 2002) more commonly associated with labour migration. In the established image, “On the peasant side is the ideal of reciprocity and cyclical exchange, guaranteeing production, reproduction, and fertility. On the plantation [or migration] side, by contrast, exploitation, barrenness of human relations, and death coexist with the production of wealth. The former mode is felt to be self-perpetuating, whereas the latter is self-extinguishing. It is the transaction that ends social interaction by bargaining away sociability for thralldom to the kingdom of things” (Taussig 1980: 120). In San Isidro, not all sociability had been ‘bargained away,’ though its dimensions had been altered. Regular work patterns meant people could still come home and catch up with friends and family – as detailed in the following section. With so many workers regularly leaving and returning, a social layer had been added to the economic and political ‘liminality’ that dominated the pursuit of livelihoods. Being at home among family and friends contrasted with the experience of isolated work in the Amazon jungle, and yet those returning home were considered to be the lucky ones, as people who had managed to get a job.

Immediate Imperatives

Fabian Copara pats the wooden bench beside him, grins, and beckons me over with his spare hand – clutching a small plastic cup and bottle of Pilsener in the other. It's Friday night and he's back home from work for a week, meeting up with a handful of pals, drinking in the shop. Sra Nancy has recruited her teenage daughter Josselyn to staff the counter. Amidst the hoots and chatter, she stoically chews a pen whilst doing homework exercises, quietly exchanges empty beers for full ones, and sells individual cigarettes to the increasingly thirsty crowd. A tiny portable black and white TV chirps over a football match in the corner. As I'm introduced around, I ask Fabian where he's come home from, and he points, with a slur, to the white letters 'CPEB' embroidered on the leg of his well-worn jeans. "The Oriente region, that's where I work – for these guys – that's who pays me... they're Chinese. Oil. The oil companies (los petroleros). The Chinese. They've come so far [to Ecuador]! I have to travel far away too, to work. Not as far as them, sure! But yeah – they're the ones who pay me".

Beers got passed around and the conversation swelled to include Fabian's friends. It turned out he wasn't the only one among this small group who had an employer based in China. Xavier Hidalgo, his cousin, also worked with CPEB, though on a different site to Fabian. I also got talking to Freddy Chancusi, home temporarily from his job as a policeman in Quito, spending time with his wife María and their two daughters, and he warmed to the topic of work – where people work, who for, and why. He summed up how he saw the contemporary state of affairs with a pithy tripartite, asking "What are we going to do? What else can we do? There aren't any choices. What can young people here do? What are the options? The options available to young people here, I'll tell you... for young men from San Isidro, there are three: the police, the military, the oil industry."

Counting the options off the fingers of one hand with the deliberate gestures of the other, he seemed struck afresh by the indubitable accuracy of his observation. Others in the room agreed. Still in high school and a friend of Fabian's family, Carlos

Guamán nodded in chuckled resignation. At 16, the prospect of working away for him drew an equivocal response: “I might look [for work] with the oil companies – my dad’s there, that helps. My neighbour too. I’d get paid ok. Maybe there’s something closer to here. Something... round about. Maybe as a chef in Latacunga [the provincial capital] – only an hour or two away, but we’ll see, we’ll see... why not with *los petroleros*?!”

Regular remigrations were not an option for everyone, however. Glenda Rojas (age 25) lived with her parents, daughter and two younger siblings in San Isidro. Her father, Don Gonzalo, worked as a reporter in Latacunga, which was close enough to commute each day. It was a steady job (with the provincial television channel run by MICC) and their family rented extra land from a neighbour who had moved to Quito – their family had sufficient land to stay in San Isidro, and she wanted to avoid moving away. Unfortunately, this looked increasingly difficult. She commented on how relatively easy it was to find work in the oil industry, at least in comparison with her own line of work. Having graduated from a course in Eco-Tourism and after a spell of related work in the neighbouring region of La Maná (which abruptly came to an end a year earlier), she felt it was inevitable that she would move away, most likely permanently: “the kinds of jobs I’m looking for, I won’t be able to travel [regularly, for work / *viajar para trabajar*]. I’ll have to leave. Not like everyone who works in the *Oriente*... I’ll have to leave. Lots of people have to. Those who stay, they’re lucky. Without travelling, staying here is hard. *Esta comunidad sobrevive con el dinero petrolero* (This community survives on oil money). Some people here have lots of money.”

Toil and Travel

When Raúl Allauca first began regular travels between his home and *el Oriente*, there were few nearby job prospects, and numbers have since dropped. There were more people looking for work now – too many to all find work among the few local options. There was a small number of export plantations in operation in the parish, alongside the Cusubamba road that tracks through the Alpamalag valley, past San

Isidro and into Pujilí. They occupied the vast sites of some of the old *hacienda* farms, and employed people – mainly women – to plant, pick and process broccoli destined for the USA, or roses bound for the markets of Russia. Most of the local plantation employees, however, came from villages other than (but still close to) San Isidro. Some travelled down into the valley from more isolated hill-communities like Yacubamba and Yanahurco. Opportunities were limited, and reports were rife of workers suffering ill health due to exposure to agrochemicals. In San Isidro I only met one woman who had ever worked in the plantations, and then only on a short-term, seasonal contract. Unlike the oil industry, this line of work had never been established as a primary option.

The Pujilí-Cusubamba road was where you would find regular, rickety buses heading into town. Walking there from where I was living in San Isidro took you down the *hacienda's* vehicle-access track, pitted and lined with *penko/agave* plants. More often than not you'd meet someone en route or at the roadside, waiting. I often seemed to bump into Don Efraín, a man in his fifties and well known in the community. Even though his household had not joined the irrigation-pipeline project, he made a point of participating in meetings of the *asamblea comunitaria*, and took his participation in community elections very seriously. One morning I got to the end of the *hacienda* track (which was as dry as ever at that time, midway through the year) just a few paces behind him. He was sharply dressed. A couple of coolly stamped steps of tap dance dusted off his shoes on the road's dry tarmac. He was getting an early bus into Pujilí, as he did every day, he told me, looking for work. He used to work *en el Oriente*, on what was one of the increasingly standard, and precarious, *contratos temporales* (temporary contracts).

Eventually, though, even the temporary work had dried up. This was a spell when there was simply 'not much work' available, and it was only the 'few lucky ones' who still had long(er)-term contracts with the *petroleros* and were able continue earning a steady income. He recalled happier times, and still remained positive: "It's not like how it used to be – they haven't called me for months," he told me, "you wait – in the case of *Petroecuador* – you wait for the government's call – for when

there's more work, more contracts available, when more workers are required... this government is much better: much more money and support for the people, for workers. He [Correa] knows, recognises that Ecuador could be – that Ecuador is – a rich country, rich with lots of oil. There's all the oil you want here in Ecuador! Before... all that wealth just went straight into their pockets... now, though, there's more money for us, for the people. I'll be working in el Oriente again, back there, when there's some more work going."

Others had been more fortunate, though the various demands on their time were conspicuous both in descriptions of working life, and in the organisation of their households. After a particularly exhausting weekend-long *minga* in the páramo hills, I made the 5-hour hike home in the company of Don Manillo Copara and Don William Chugchilan. They were leaving on the Sunday afternoon slightly ahead of everyone else, in order to travel late into the night ahead of their Monday-morning shift-starts. Don Manillo worked in Amazonia, and described working conditions with his customary humour: "I don't work for a Chinese company, but an Ecuadorian one. Before that, it was an Italian company, and before that, a group from the USA. The Chinese pay very little... the Brazilian firms pay best, they say – [with a nudge] I'd like to meet a Brazilian!" Don Manillo worked the 14-7 shift-pattern in a general maintenance job for a drilling company, and they would fly him to Coca before helicoptering his team to the rig-site.

Don William worked away in a skilled construction job in Guayaquil on the coast, following a 22-8 work-pattern. He was experienced, reflected in his relatively high salary. Just a quarter, roughly, of his time was spent in San Isidro with family and friends. The jokes continued: "that's right, eight days – eight days back to the wife, back to 'the ABC'!" He had trained in the job and so he was paid more than most people on-site. Costs, food, accommodation were all paid in addition to his salary, and he still brought home US\$480 a month.

That figure was double the national minimum monthly salary. Some of the few people from San Isidro who were working in skilled, technical posts in the oil-

industry could expect to make double that again, although they were the exception. Skilled jobs were usually in *perforación* (drilling) and people (such as Geovanny, below) were quite happy to talk about their work (though not always about their salary, which ranged closer to US\$600/month). Those working in lower-paid jobs might describe their position as *obrero, no más* ('just a worker') or simply as *peón* ('labourer,' the same word as used locally to refer to farmhands, or individuals paid to take somebody else's place *en turno* in community work).

People who worked in 'catering' or other support positions were still relatively well paid, typically earning salaries just less than those of Don William. Salaries ranged around US\$350/month for unskilled work. Most people earned c.US\$400/month, comparable with the salary for a skilled position in a government department or international organisation: for example Rocío Simaluisa working for the iNGO *Fundación Jardín de Eden*, or Porfirio working as a regional project manager for INFA (*Instituto de Niñez y Familias*).

During our hike back to San Isidro from the páramo, I asked about the loss of home time that came with their work schedules. Don Manillo was quick to respond, regarding the sacrifice as an inevitable product of a lack of work in the region. He recognised his own favourable position in relation to those on more temporary contracts in Amazonia, who suffer much more irregular employment: "I'm lucky, I've got an old [long-term] contract – it's harder today." Nonetheless, the sacrifice of travel and separation resulting from regular labour-migration was inevitable if one was to find work which was "well-paid, or regular, reliable... there aren't jobs like that round here". He summarised, with a scoff, this absence of alternatives: "such is the life of the poor (*los pobres*)... [of the worker? I asked], yeah – that's right, if you want to work – and everyone needs to work – that's how it is..."

Campesinos

Despite the universal/ising nature of an economic imperative and the difficult search for the work, migration practices to and from San Isidro were quite unique. Visiting

neighbouring communities, those elsewhere in the Alpamalag valley and other members of OPIJJ (often with my friend Rodrigo Tucumbi from MICC), it was rare to meet someone who worked in *el Oriente*. San Isidro had become known locally for its oil workers.

Rodrigo lived in Rayoloma, a small community of just 30 households that sits atop a ridge overlooking San Isidro – you can hike between the two places in a couple of hours. One evening I visited his extended-family home (both his parents have passed away). Here, uncles, aunts, cousins and his grandmother congregated nightly to cook, eat, warm themselves by the large open fire toward the centre of the large single-room, thatched-roof, windowless house. Amid lively chat, invites to play in the Rayoloma football team, and more political discussion of relations between ‘highland’ and ‘lowland’ community-members of OPIJJ (in relation to the ongoing legal case against the ‘*brocolero*’ haciendas in the local Alpamalag valley bottom), I was struck by a sound I had never heard before. I was keen to focus my attention on it, though no one else seemed especially concerned by its eerie presence.

From the cold night breeze outside came a distant drifting haunt of a cry, a lilting wail, a woman’s voice raised, and seemingly floating down from a hilltop somewhere near-yet-far. I asked. “Oh, that!” came Rodrigo’s reply: “Yes, listen... she’s making an announcement. Tomorrow... there’ll be... a minga – working in the water-channels on the other side [of the hill here]... This is our news – this is how we find out about things... it’s always been done like this here, and we still do it like this – calling out from the top of the hill... that way, everyone can hear – everyone who needs to!” Rodrigo further picked up on my surprise, and issued a telling statement of his own views of local difference and variation: “nothing like this in San Isidro, right? Loudspeakers there! They don’t communicate like this – they wouldn’t announce a minga this way... using mobile phones. Not here – it’s so different there – that’s why I invited you to hear to share in life here – to visit my house and family here... it’s not luxurious, but you can share in what we do have. And, new experiences for you! Down there [in San Isidro], so close to the road, close to everything... no one speaks Kichwa there anymore – we still do, though not

everybody, and not all the time – but it’s part of how we live... in San Isidro, they’re more like *campesinos* than *indígenas*.”

It wasn’t only those on the outside looking in, however, who framed social change in San Isidro in similar terms of identity (v. ‘Impacts and Divisions,’ below). Some of these changes stemmed from location, whilst other factors had allowed the number of people working in the oil industry to snowball. Of all the 15 member-villages of OPIJJ, San Isidro is closest to the parish market-town and commercial/transport hub of Pujilí. A 20-minute walk plus a 20-minute bus ride via a regular service (or 30 minutes in a truck) is enough to make the journey one-way. It is indeed, relatively speaking, “so close to the road”, in Rodrigo’s words. This situation is very different to the non-existent bus service to/from (the most distant OPIJJ community-member) Yanahurco, and what might be very costly and/or time-consuming attempts to negotiate a truck which would then clatter for up to two hours over rugged tracks eaten away by the elements, dropping-off and picking-up more passengers en route. Similarly, though Rayoloma is perhaps only three miles from San Isidro as the crow flies, access tracks for motor vehicles follow a route of nearly ten miles.

Yet, San Isidro’s history of migration is not only linked to being located close to the road network. Regular remigrations were also enabled through a reliance on connections and kin. The process of applying for a job in the oil industry is far from uncomplicated – and knowing the process, or knowing someone who can advise you on it, was vital. The main hurdle was bureaucratic.

Medical clearance was necessary for all oil-industry positions, whether technical or ‘support’ based, and the process of obtaining the requisite paperwork depended heavily on having personal or familial expert advice. Eighteen year-old Iván managed to complete this in a single day, but only because his father had done it before him, as had both his uncles (Don Vicente (Fig.14), and Don Alberto). Iván knew which clinic in Quito would both allow him to book an appointment in advance and would not rip him off with exorbitant prices like many other private clinics in the capital, which forms (and signed by who) he had to leave with, and what information

(and photocopied documents) he had to arrive with in the morning. By being able to access this knowledge and information from their family, elders and associates, younger residents in San Isidro effectively inherited career options that remain otherwise obscure or impossible for those of a similar age and situation living in the local area.



Figure 14 – Don Vicente Guamán (l) and Sra Salvadora Chancusi (r) delayed the baptism of their son for months in order to coordinate a time when a priest would be available to conduct the ceremony in San Isidro, Don Vicente would be home from his work in *el Oriente*, and as many family members as possible would also be ‘at home.’ Here, at the baptism festivities, Don Vicente pours *trago* and Sra Salvadora serves *chicha* (maize beer).

II. Liminality and the National Context

Rural People and Redefinition

Distinct labour migration practices in San Isidro enable us to look again at how historically marginalised people experience their participation in, and absorption

into, ongoing processes of ‘semiproletarianization’ (Martínez Novo 2008; Kay 1995; Taussig 1980; Quiroga 2003). As community action continues, Godelier refers to these processes as “the two-pronged movement of economic integration and reassertion of national or local identities” (Godelier 2010: 10). As we saw in Chapter 2, processes of Land Reform in 1964 ‘contributed to the spread of impersonal wage relations’ in highland Ecuador but ‘merely accelerated’ [rather than initiated] an existing trend (Zevallos 1989: 43). Porfirio offered a similar account, reflecting on the changes brought about by IERAC and land reform, where the end of forced-labour on the hacienda also brought about the start of widespread labour-migration from San Isidro (and elsewhere locally). Normally, the destination was large plantations in the coastal regions geared towards the export of bananas and cacao. As he put it: “for the first time, the people felt free, free to move, to travel, to work where they wanted to – and they wanted to, far from where they had been forced to work... it’s a similar process today too, I think: the idea of freedom, travelling away to work – but it’s not freedom.”

Writing on the same era, Mary Weismantel (1988: 74) described the ‘death of the *hacienda*’ in the 1960s as something that “brought an end to many of the structures that had enabled hacienda peons to satisfy their needs without cash. Yet they were also left without the wherewithal to enter the cash economy fully” – the result being an “impoverished emancipation” which “put men in motion in search of other income” (Collredo-Mansfeld 2009: 37). Others have illustrated how incomplete and ineffective Agrarian Reform was in the 1960s and 1970s (Whitten 2003; Meisch 1992). These reforms sought to enfranchise and grant land titles to rural populations. At the same time, however, they devalued and suppressed certain forms of agricultural production in favour of a universalizing drive toward ‘modernization’ and development (Meisch 1992: 56-8).

These policies and processes of ‘devaluing,’ ‘incomplete transformation’ and the parallels with a national economy undergoing ‘asymmetrical integration’ into a global economy (Tamayo-Flores 1993) are explored further in Chapter 7. Here, I

want to draw attention to the sense of *liminality*⁴⁵ that emerges in the contrast between conflicting forces, as they relate to economic timeframes. On the one hand are the immediate needs that result from poverty, on the other the long-term goal of ‘emancipation’ which, as many argue, is an impossibility without the means to address the former (Weismantel 1988: 4; Gledhill 1995; Pallares 2002). In San Isidro this picture is complicated further by the ongoing presence and influence of the *hacienda* – it no longer plays the role it once did in dominating working life there, but I doubt anyone would describe it as ‘dead’ (v. Chapter 5).

In much analytical work, ‘action’ is preceded by an adjective: intentional, collective, indigenous, political. Intentional action might be action undertaken deliberately, for particular reasons. This can distinguish between physical movements and gestures, or else suggest that all ‘actions’ are intentional in some respect (Raz 1999; Ingold 2000). Indigenous action and political action, meanwhile, is often assumed to have – or be aiming at having – a positive impact on the world in conditions of inequality (de la Cadena & Starn 2007; Nash 2001; Scott 1990). The contested nature of the political realm, however, means that any understanding of these terms (and, specifically, of the practices and events they describe) is unlikely to remain definitive for long – something that is particularly true for South American countries such as Ecuador (Jimeno 2008: 86; Whitten 2003; Becker 2011b). With these terms, the kinds of action that our attention is drawn to tend to be defined either by the conflict of which they form a part, or they are presented as taking place in contexts and situations beyond the immediate control of the actors.

In San Isidro, the undeniable persistence of powerful interests creates *liminality* not only between conflicting timeframes, but also in the contrast between projected outcomes of, and possibilities for, action. Community action often led to tensions and conflicts, its outcomes uncertain or susceptible to further disputes and

⁴⁵ In developing van Gennep’s (1960) notion of the ‘liminal phase,’ Turner distinguishes between ‘state’ and ‘transition’ (Turner 1995 [1969]: 94), where ‘states’ imply relative stability and clearly defined social norms, and ‘transition’ refers to the passage through all of “separation-marginality-reincorporation” (Jackson 2005: 110), from one ‘state’ to another. As I argue here, however, political and economic marginalisation experienced as ‘liminality’ does not imply that there has been stability in the past, nor that there is expected to be stability in the future – rather this is a perpetual state-of-affairs that shapes the context and conditions within which people undertake action.

oppositions. Meanwhile, the power and occasional violence of neighbouring landowners, the dwindling size of familial landholdings and, as highlighted here, the shortage of employment opportunities – these things were increasingly definitive and undeniable. The unforgiving ‘reality’ of local labour scarcity (which Freddy outlined) had become, if nothing else, predictable.

A further aspect to *liminality* in processes of semiproletarianization stems from participation in the wider labour market – usually on terms which best suit the needs of the employers, and which result in these processes being forever incomplete. Rural communities are not ‘refuges’ from ‘capitalism and globalization’ but are places where those processes are acutely experienced, places where “people must confront the wider economy’s social costs with little of its material gains” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 5). We see this in how the twentieth-century growth of capitalist models of production in Ecuador – the focus of drives toward ‘modernization’ (Chapter 7) – did not lead to the ‘peasantry’ disappearing: instead, those ‘peasants’ and their livelihoods were merely *redefined* (Johnson 2004; McMichael 2006: 410). Thus different government policies have in the past directed themselves toward what’s called the “Indian problem” and, in so doing, recreated the very issues they outwardly sought to ‘resolve’: “as long as structures of inequality persist, the name may change (peasant to proletariat, indigenous to labourer), but the ‘problem’ persists, since the problem was never the dispossessed group, but was always the system of dispossession” (Kenrick 2011a: 201).

For the vast majority of highland indigenous communities in Ecuador, economic marginalisation persisted, even while the political landscape was transformed through Indigenous Uprisings in the 1990s and since (Martínez Novo 2009). Like so many people from San Isidro, rural populations who were once described by researchers and politicians as peasants are now (also) migrant workers, members of the precariat, the rural poor, etc. This perpetual state of continual redefinition – occupying changing positions of hardship within persistent economic inequalities – is ‘liminal’ in the sense that it never fits (or arrives at) either side of the purported model of change, whether that be one of reform (Weismantel 1988), modernisation

(Meisch 1992) or development (Bebbington 2000). The timeframe of the near future maps onto this state of being ‘in between’ – the realm of action and its outcomes between long-term or unobtainable goals of economic prosperity or stability on one hand, and the immediacy of diverse needs and conflicts on the other. Ongoing ‘redefinition’ also had repercussions in terms of identification and self-redefinition. As we shall see, many San Isidro residents themselves tackled these issues – especially those of an age whose young children were set to face more intense pressures (of a lack of employment, of land) than they faced in their own lives.

Articulation: Consequence and Agency

Whilst the distinct practices of ‘regular remigration’ in San Isidro were not replicated in neighbouring communities, the various flows and forces that shape ‘redefinition’ create similar effects throughout the highlands. Drawing on work conducted within villages close to Otavalo, about 100 miles north along Ecuador’s Andean ridge, Colloredo-Mansfeld illustrates how San Isidro residents are hardly alone in facing ‘chronic economic insecurity,’ the need for many households to ‘diversify their incomes’, and the fact that land-based self-sufficiency is becoming increasingly ‘impossible’ due to “a growing population, continued inequality in land distribution, and declining soil fertility” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999: 91). However, the difficulties of sustaining rural livelihoods (intensified by a decline in the available land base) have deep historical roots.

For Latin America’s rural populations and ‘land-poor peasants,’ migratory practices in search of paid employment have long been emblematic of strategies necessary for the material reproduction of lives and livelihoods⁴⁶. Travelling to trade in this way – labour migration – has shifted in scope and scale over the centuries. Historical accounts have emphasised the emergence and adaptivity of diverse migration practices within rural locales (Wolf 1955; Stern 1987; Whitmore & Turner 1992; Bebbington 2000: 500):

⁴⁶ v. Nash 1994: 16; Borras & Franco 2009: 17; Edelman 2005: 338; Borras 2004: 9.

“Subsistence plots, wage work, craft sales, *compadre* networks, migration from the fields to the city and back again are all elemental features of the [rural Otavalo] economy. Not much new in this. Peasants throughout Latin America have long tried to protect themselves with subsistence resources, to embrace what opportunities were afforded to them in the wider economy, and to strike compromises necessary for operating in a dualized political economy.”

(Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999: 24, on Wolf 1955)

Such strategies have been particularly important for those moving between highland Andean areas and the surrounding lowland regions (Larson & Harris 1995; Powers 1995; Swanson 2005). These populations have created livelihoods whose subsistence practices are said to function in ‘articulation’ *with* the wage labour economy (Mayer 2002; as at Crawford 2008: 166) – or *within* the ‘dualized political economy’ (in Colloredo-Mansfeld’s terms) – further divided by racialized ideology and praxis (Whitten 2003: 23). More recent accounts have focused on international labour migration. Ecuador provides no major exception to global trends of urbanisation emerging from the search for paid employment (Swanson 2010). International migration has also increased dramatically within the last generation: around 10-15% of a total of c.14 million population are thought to be living overseas, concentrated in the USA and Western Europe, now forming one of the largest immigrant groups in New York City, and the second largest within Spain’s borders (Jokisch 2007). The increasing prominence of these transnational, migratory swathes –and the complex livelihood practices they generate – is matched in an extensive literature⁴⁷.

In work on Ecuadorian migrants who remain *within* the country, scholarly attention has focused on the integration of wage-labour into the livelihoods of indigenous populations *in situ* – in particular those in the Andean regions. This work addresses the localised employment offers and impacts of land- or resource-hungry industries (Korovkin 1997), the expansion of other local industries (Ferraro 2006; Martínez Valle 2002), or the growing wealth of a ‘native leisure class’ in specific places such as Otavalo (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Colloredo-Mansfeld & Antrosio 2009; Latta 2011).

⁴⁷ See examples: Miles 2004; Jokisch & Kyle 2008; Kyle 2000; Korovkin 2001; Martínez Valle 2004; Swanson 2010; Jokisch & Pribilsky 2002.

Other analysts focus on groups who gradually establish two homes, splitting their time between cities or sites of trade for some of the year, and a rural village or community for the rest. There are indigenous groups utilizing traditional crafts and materials who travel to trade in them, typically to the capital Quito. Most visible among them are artists from Tigua (Whitten 2003; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2003; 2009) or weavers and musicians from Otavalo (Wibbelsman 2009; Rowe 2007; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2003; Meisch 2002, 1998), some of who also emigrate with these trades (Latta 2011). Beyond these patterns, labour migration within Ecuador's borders is most commonly linked to seasonal work, typically concentrated in coastal regions (Gerber & Veuthey 2010), with sugar plantation workers travelling down from their homes in the highlands (Bebbington 2000: 504), for example.

As we have seen, these diverse orderings of 'articulated' economic life have been summarised and merged as *semiproletarianization*: "the ever incomplete absorption of poor rural people into the urban economy"; a 'permanent process' of negotiating the "necessity of wage labour" (Kay 1995: 36) with a dependence on or attachment to land (Becker 2007: 8). Other sources interpret periodic migration as "a deliberate attempt to continue to be a campesino (Farrell et al. 1989), and to retain some form of economic activity that offers a buffer against downturns in urban labor markets (cf. Brown et al. 1997)" (Bebbington 2000: 503). Theoretical attempts to synthesise such a diverse range of livelihood practices remain broad. They do, however, highlight both sides of a balance involving: (i) 'the sense in which migration is, in considerable measure, a consequence of structural constraints and regional underdevelopment'; and (ii) the intentional agency of migrant labourers – migration is thus seen as "a *strategy* as well as a *necessity*" (Bebbington 2000: 503, italics original).

It might seem somewhat forced to separate 'necessity' and 'strategy' in the first place: what for some people is a necessity might not be for others, and equally providing for the essentials of sustenance and survival (necessity) might require varying degrees of strategy to be successful. The separation is perhaps not required, however. Whilst Arendt maintained a similar distinction between forms of activity –

labour (rooted in immediate needs and consumption) and action (free of these restraints) (Arendt 1958) – the distinction is less artificial or ideal when considered in relation to time. The temporal frame of strategy (or, for Arendt, action) is similar to that of ‘engaging in struggles for specific goals’ and ‘implicating oneself in ongoing social flows’ – the near future (Guyer 2007: 409). Even though action does not necessarily pursue specific ends, its consequences shape the hopes and expectations of those taking part – and again this is the realm of planning, hoping, and the near future (ibid.). As detailed in the previous two chapters, the bulk of activity undertaken as a community in San Isidro is related to the shared irrigation pipeline. These forms of action and their consequences also ‘inhabit the near future’ (Guyer 2007) in two ways. They ‘engage in struggles for specific goals’ (to initially secure funding for the project, then to work to keep it functioning) and also ‘implicate’ those taking part in ‘ongoing social flows’ – that is, enable similar actions to be undertaken (by younger relatives and neighbours) in the future.

Other accounts of action explicitly address questions of temporality. As described in Chapter 1, Ortner follows Gramsci (1957) and outlines a ‘projects’ perspective on action, seen as activity that is more a matter of ‘becoming’ than of ‘getting,’ and motivated not only by needs being met but also by ‘images and ideals’ of what positive relationships or ‘conditions of life’ might entail (Ortner 1984: 152). ‘Becoming’ here again suggests a timeframe similar to that of the near future: not immediate, but not unobtainable either. For Munn, to describe action is to take account of agents’ efforts to ‘manipulate’ time (Bourdieu 1977: 90; Munn 1992: 107). That is, to investigate how the ‘scope’ of action is measured and understood, both in terms of practice and of outcome (ibid.). The ‘manipulation’ of time affects possibilities and motivations for action (as distinct from work), and also shapes the conditions of different forms of work.

The ‘necessity’ of work is here characterised by a particular temporality of inequalities and forms of domination, where the wage-labour economy is said to make “no promise for the future and expects none in return” (Crawford 2008: 16). Especially as paid employment becomes ever more precarious, the contrast between

‘action’ and the ‘wage-labour economy’ becomes clearer, even whilst the latter is incorporated into efforts within San Isidro to secure its own future. Meanwhile, the oil industry managing those precarious jobs for migrant workers itself depends on political shifts that mirror Guyer’s account of the rhetoric of neoliberalism: evacuating the near future by emphasising timeframes of the immediate on one hand, and the distant, unobtainable realm on the other.

Beggars and Gold

The letters CPEB on Fabian’s jeans stood for *Changqing Petroleum Exploration Bureau*, a subsidiary of *China National Petroleum Corporation* (CNPC – China’s biggest oil producer) and one of a number of oil companies who have ‘invested’ (acquired oil producing assets) in Ecuador in recent years⁴⁸. Whilst in some areas Correa’s government had specifically set out to renegotiate relationships with foreign investors concerning Ecuador’s oil reserves (El Universo 2010), drilling elsewhere continues apace. This was in line with other branches of ‘neo-extractivist’ policy (in Ecuador and elsewhere), whereby countries negotiate a greater share of the proceeds of mineral exploitation, but still depend heavily on export markets of raw materials (Fatheuer 2011: 13; Gudynas 2013).

No podemos ser mendigos sentados sobre un saco de oro (“We cannot be beggars sitting on a sack of gold”) – the words of President Correa in March 2012 upon signing a US\$1.4 billion contract with Chinese-owned company Ecuacorriente, to begin open-pit strip-mining of copper in Amazonía (El Comercio 2012c; Becker 2012). Powerful words, which for some are a crude application of “the illusion of all-powerful extractivism” (Acosta 2010: 4), and which have the effect of cementing in

⁴⁸ Operative in Ecuador are companies from Brazil (Petrobras), Italy (Agip Oil/Eni Petrex), and consortia funded by Spain/Argentina (Repsol-YPF) or the CNPC itself (as Andes Petroleum), amongst others (BBC 2010). This is in addition to numerous drilling, prospecting and contracting companies mainly from the USA/Canada and China. There are also numerous contracting and drilling companies (such as Nabors International [Bermuda/US]), and even though a number of US firms have ceased operations in Ecuador, there remains a number of state-run oil companies in action (from China: Sinopec, CNPC, and Petrochina; from Venezuela: PDVSA; from Brazil: Petrobell/Synergy; and noted interest from firms in neighbouring countries (Columbia/Ecopetrol and PetroPeru) (Amazon Watch 2011).

place another variant on the trope that defines – or tries to define – so much of the relationship between state and citizen, the nation and the world, prospectors and dwellers, investors and workers.

The message? As Correa's singular approach to the media might suggest (widely recognised as someone whose escalating antipathy to dialogue displays a resolute disregard for the merits of debate): there is no alternative, I am in control, and opposition is misguided. Opposition might also be "childish" as Correa has, in the past, dismissed indigenous and environmental groups' resistance to mining proposals, resistance which he denied entirely: "The dilemma is not 'no' or 'yes' to mining. It is well-developed mining. There is simply no dilemma" (quoted by Dosh & Kligerman 2009). The imperative is clear: the "we" of the nation cannot be actual – that is, viable – unless we adapt ourselves to 'the way things are,' and not only adapt, but toil, drill, commodify, sell and submit – and now.

Within these strictures of submission, there's some scope for redefining roles, some ways – other than defaulting on debt – to confront US imperialism, stand firm, be 'sovereign.' These include renegotiating contracts to increase state-income from oil deals, and so to become something other than a southern continental Okie stuck selling pickaxes to prospectors, whose thirsty travels see them flocking in swarms to an Amazonian Sutter's Mill – a horde with rising tigers to the Left and wealthy missionaries to the Right. In Correa's words, during the state-run PetroEcuador's takeover of holdings claimed by US-based corporation Occidental Petroleum (in reaction to the sale of some its holdings to a Canadian company, in violation of contract), these are declarative acts – he said, "We are not going to allow an arrogant, portentous transnational that doesn't respect Ecuadoran laws to harm our country" and, as a result, PetroEcuador began to control more than half of the country's petroleum exports (Burbach 2007).

One clause of these age-old 'investor' contracts, however, appears to remain firmly in place – if you live where the gold is, you will be annihilated – as another inherited imperative declares. South America's soil, after all, covers not one but many sources

of subterranean and ‘time-compacted’ magic (Taussig 2004: xix). Renegotiating ways to utter (or pronounce) sovereignty, to become agent and stand as merchant in your own right – a less-so-than-before-but-still-peripheral player on the world stage – is to express an ambition for the twenty-first century that befits a socialist head. And this had become the prophecy, the long-term mission – the revolution that went on and on toward distant future horizons.

During the course of my fieldwork, there was a change to the slogan accompanying all government public-information bulletins, which were broadcast across radio and television, and frequently interrupted an evening’s entertainment in the form of a Mexican *telenovela* – watched on a small black-and-white television from the bed, where the whole family of six of us would perch and watch. What was *la Revolución Ciudadana está en marcha* became *la Revolución Ciudadana avanza*. Whether official proclamations were declaring that the ‘revolution’ ‘is under way’ or ‘is moving forward’ was moot, however. Its relevance to the organization of everyday life in a place like San Isidro remained unclear, and added only a propagandist sheen to the government’s various investments – as did the glossy production of a video, of smiling people from different parts of the country, appropriating the Beatles’ song ‘Hey Jude’ as the revolution’s ‘hymn.’

That said, there were as many supporters and detractors of the Correa government in San Isidro, and there was no escaping the monument to increased social investment right on the doorstep: the irrigation pipeline had been funded with large amounts of money from governmental body INAR after 2007. However, many other state-funded provisions remained irregular. Even though investment in health had increased massively in recent years, queues to see a doctor in the nearest (inaccessible, overcrowded) health clinic at San Gerardo were as long as ever. On top of this, unsubsidised medication remained prohibitively expensive for most people.

Correa’s speech in 2012 wasn’t the first time Ecuadorians had heard the phrase about beggars and gold, however. He ‘resorted to the same metaphor’ in his report to the

nation on 15th January 2009, declaring, “*We will not go back on the Mining Law, because the responsible development of mining is essential for the progress of the country. We cannot sit on a gold sack like beggars*” (quoted by Acosta 2010: 4). This turn-of-phrase could pass as just another example of wonted rhetorical bluster, were it not for the echoes it returns of an earlier view of Latin American countries more generally, and of Ecuador in particular. Alberto Acosta relays how the German naturalist and geographer Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) is said to have been so struck by the diverse natural riches of the area that he saw its inhabitants as ‘beggars sitting on a sack of gold’ in reference to their ‘vast untapped natural wealth’ and, in so doing, he ‘ratified their mission as exporters of Nature’ by declaring the obligation ‘to increasingly exploit existing natural resources’ in accord with ‘the exploitative Reason of that time’ (Acosta 2010: 2).

The extractive industries, then, have an indelible, piercing and exhaustive hold on life in Ecuador – gold of the glutinous black variety perhaps more so than most. The energy of a billion suns compressed into its syrup over millions of years – and stored there for the evermore that lasts until now – an era of absolute imperative (Guyer 2007; Weber 1946: 124). There’s an awkward parallel here. On one hand, oil’s powers to swell the nation’s coffers, coupled with its use as a tool allowing the dominance of immediate needs in extractivist policy (Becker 2011b: 187). On the other, the opportunities for income it has provided to many San Isidro residents, enabling them to meet immediate economic imperatives – benefits accompanied by absence and division.

III. Impacts, Divisions, Transformations

Income and Agriculture

There were distinct benefits brought by labour migration at the community level, despite the tensions and divisions that increasing income inequality had generated. Some of these had developed slowly over time. A recognised, ‘well-organized’ and

well-thought-of community was in a stronger position to seek outside support – its *directiva* able to utilise a good reputation to positive ends (as with the effective use of *mingas* in Chapter 3). A community that could quickly put to use any resources it acquired in this way was more likely to retain such a reputation. Among other factors facilitating this efficacious deployment of support – in addition to the input of key individuals, particular skills and levels of expertise – were the material resources resulting from increased cash incomes. Added to these were other effects beyond an increased number of resources, vehicles, and tools. Regular remigrations also provided the community with a boosted labour force. Enabled through the extra resources at the disposal of the community, and encouraged by the ‘absence’ involved in oil industry shift-work (in particular) – many people would return home with a renewed interest in communal life, in part to counteract the lack of engagement with the familiar that travelling away demanded. Projects such as the pipeline depended on regular *mingas* of a size that would have been impossible to rally without at least some returned migrants to add to the migrants’ families and permanent residents who were the more regular participants.

At the same time, the high salaries of a small number of oil workers tested the relationships, expectations and sense of mutual obligation that underpinned community projects. Although the emerging ‘differences of class’ (as Porfirio put it) were undeniable, they materialised in different ways in different households. There were conspicuous forms of consumption – in addition to trucks – that had altered the built environment in communities across the region: large, painted houses of more than one storey (Leinaweaver 2009; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1994). Increased disposable income had also influenced other decisions within family life.

Some families had chosen to send their children to different schools. This was more expensive because they were further away (in Latacunga rather than in Pujilí) and, in a couple of cases, due to annual fees. Over breakfast one day, Rocío singled out Don Hernán as an example of someone who flaunted his income earned in the oil-industry. Not only was his house three storeys tall (and finished with tinted, reflective glass, making it something of a landmark in the village), but she felt other

actions of his warranted criticism: “He wants everything to be easy, simple – to pay, nothing more... yes, he works in the Oriente. I think he doesn’t know much about life here [any more]. He doesn’t [use] the water [system] now. Also, his children study in Latacunga, those expensive uniforms... the children have to leave home at 5.30 in the morning. The studies are the same! It’s just that some people have this idea, they think [that by doing this] they are *mas alto*... that they are ‘better than’ others, somehow – they think they are better than their neighbours”.

Less visible were the more private purchases of grave sites in Pujilí’s cemetery. During the *Finados* (All Souls Day) festivities of November 2nd, I happened to get a lift back to San Isidro with former-president (and oil-worker) Don Graibi, in his truck. En route we picked up Hilda, daughter of Don Hernán (the object of Rocío’s vexation, above). I had earlier noticed the quite distinct areas of the large parish-wide cemetery, those that were home to rows of above-ground, or stacked tombs, and those more spread-out, below-ground graves marked with individual gravestones. The latter, Pachacutic told me, were “for the rich people.” As such I was struck later by the fact that there seemed to be a common assumption shared by Hilda and Don Graibi – that given their relative wealth both their families would, of course, have by now purchased a burial site in the more spacious area, and as they compared notes about their families’ respective plots, their discussion covered the various merits of different sites – a luxury unaffordable to most.

Don Graibi, though, had maintained his reputation – he was well known and respected. This was due to his previous presidency in San Isidro (at the time the pipeline finally received funding) and as the *prioste*/sponsor of the 2010 annual fiestas. He had sustained a level of respect by virtue of being ‘*dedicado*/devoted/dedicated,’ and yet he was also recognised as being *ambicioso*/ambitious. This term frequently had negative connotations of self-centredness, but here also referred to his apparently shrewd approach to investments (which wasn’t widely talked about). He owned property in Pujilí – when I met him during *Finados* he stopped off at a shop to collect rent, joking that he needed that desperately in order to buy beer for the night’s festivities. He also owned two taxi

vehicles, amidst the endless demand for such transport. His reputation as a good *compañero* remained intact partly because his wealth was slightly less conspicuously spent, but also because he maintained regular, active, vocal participation in community meetings, *mingas* and projects. He spent much of his time at ‘home’ on communal work – hence his ‘dedicated’ reputation.

His working-life facilitated this. After years of service and experience, and a series of promotions, he now worked in a managerial/supervisory post. This meant remuneration on a scale beyond that of most people in San Isidro (though I never found out just how much – like a lot of people, especially those with better-paid jobs, he preferred not to disclose exact sums). Promotion had been rewarded with not only more money, but also more time. His shift pattern now followed a pattern of two weeks at work followed by two-weeks off – he was ‘at home’ more often than everyone else who worked in the *Oriente*. Unusually for a man in his mid-thirties, he didn't have a family of his own, and so still worked on and supported his mother's plot of land, a smallholding that did not bear many signs of investment. Others in his position of relative wealth had, by contrast, chosen more directly to invest in agriculture – buying extra grazing land, rearing more livestock or building barns, plastic-greenhouses and outhouses.

One family who pursued this line of investment and expansion was that of Don Adán (then community secretary for Youth and Education). He too worked in the *Oriente*, and agricultural work at home was led by his wife Sra Olga and daughter, Tannia (then 20). Theirs became a somewhat paradigmatic approach: Tannia gave a talk at the community elections and presented the case of her mother as an example of smallholder viability. “Her” income was stressed in isolation from her husband's oil-industry earnings – and the story was that their farm now, after initial financial assistance, paid for itself. The produce was popular (lettuces, potatoes, occasional tomatoes grown in a small plastic-greenhouse), and significant sums of income were generated: “selling those makes about US\$80 a week, and then on top of that we get US\$20-30 for the milk we produce... and so that's about US\$440 income for her each month, using the land and water that we have.”

Jokisch uses the term ‘smallholder agriculturalists’ to refer to people who farm a relatively small, privately-owned area of land and who engage in ‘mixed subsistence-market strategies of production,’ whilst the term ‘landesque capital’ is borrowed from Blaikie & Brookfield (1987: 9) to describe investment in productive land (eg. in the form of terraces or irrigation) which seeks effect beyond the present crop cycle or harvest (Jokisch 2002: 524). Most migrant families in San Isidro had invested in landesque capital, and used the results to facilitate or boost production on a scale for home-consumption, even if they had not generated the same significant salary of Tannia’s family.

Raúl Allauca and Rosa Pallo had done just this. Their familial plot covered an area of particularly steep hillside, much of which had not been used for crops till they had built an extensive system of terraces. They had also in the past experimented with fish-farming in a small concrete tank built just for that purpose, started to keep a handful of sheep, and purchased extra grazing land from neighbours on lower ground at the other side of the village. These measures had not resulted in any more trips to local markets to sell produce, and so farming on the familial plot was generating no extra income. Instead, they had been able to produce more of their own meat to save money, and could feed a larger number of guinea-pigs with alfalfa grown on the extra grazing land.

This provided them with a level of security and a range of farm produce that some – for example their neighbour tía Yulisa whose land also occupied slopes but who had no terraces, and no extra land for grazing or fodder-production – had to make do without. Underpinning all such agricultural efforts was the pipeline project: a steady supply of irrigation water meant that time spent building terraces, or building plastic greenhouses, could reap valuable rewards. Whilst large-scale *mingas* to sustain the pipeline were made possible by the presence of returning migrants (whose full-time absence would make the project inviable), at the same time, the income generated by labour migration could be fruitfully invested in farming. The immediate gains of paid employment could thus be transformed into resources to support the near future – the

prospect of continued (if not increased) agricultural production in San Isidro influencing the desires and expectations of its younger residents who still saw hope in the place of their birth. One of whom was Geovanny Allauca.

Raúl and Geovanny Allauca

Raúl and Sra Rosa had four daughters and two sons. Both Geovanny (23 when I met him) and his younger brother Carlos (19) had jobs in the oil industry, following in their father's footsteps. An older brother of Porfirio who lived with his family in a nearby plot of land, Raúl was a jovial, burly-framed character who I had chance to chat to a number of times, but rarely outside of the context of a larger social setting, not least because that's where he liked to spend some time whilst home from work. His job was in Quito with the security team at a storage-dispatch unit for a global fast-food company. He could get to work in five hours, if the traffic and bus-connections were good. His shifts followed a pattern of 16 on, 8 days off. It had been steady, reliable, reasonably well paid, and involved much less travelling than working in *el Oriente*.

Raúl had no regrets at all about leaving the oil industry, and was looking forward to the time when he could stop travelling away for work altogether: "They tell me after 25 years with the company, with Pizza Hut, I can retire, and I've worked with them for 19 years, so it will be quite soon, which I'm happy about... I'll be happy to enjoy retirement here." He looked out through the open door to their sunbaked yard, and added, "this place is calm (*tranquilo*) ... I can relax here – it's not demanding, there's no dangerous work – the air is clean, there's no clanging of oil rigs or things like that. The air, clean... you can have animals here, no problem. It's safe here... here, if I want to play a game of volley-ball, catch up with some friends, I just go down to the centre, to the pitch – no problems. It's hardly like that in *el Parque la Carolina* (Quito)... there are some nice spots there, but it's not the same... you wouldn't want to walk there at night..."

Hanging in frames on the walls of their living room were various mementos,

including family photos and now-redundant *sucre* bank notes (Ecuador's currency replaced by the US dollar in 2000). In and amongst these, also framed, were a small number of Pizza Hut diplomas and awards from his employers. As we talked, out of the heat of the afternoon sun, Sra Rosa came in, cradling their first grandchild. Tamia was the one-year-old daughter of their eldest, Marisol, who worked as a teacher in a *colegio* in the small town of Planchaloma, a couple of hours away by bus. They were awaiting the return of their older son, Geovanny, due back for a week at home after two weeks working away.

Rosa told me how he would be *casi muerto* when he came through the door: "he'll be... 'almost dead'... he always is. Though he comes home for seven days and works away there in the *Oriente* for fourteen days, those fourteen days are changed so that he works seven days, 6am till 6pm, followed by seven nights, 6pm till 6am... by the time he comes home he's just exhausted... it's such hard work!" To illustrate this, they played me a 'Christmas DVD' made by the company, by the team who work on "Nabors – Rig 794," which showed the kinds of things he does, and where, and who with. An un-narrated hour of footage of men in protective clothing and harnesses, high up the steel-frame structure of a drilling-rig, attaching-moving-storing-reattaching metal shafts and components of the kilometres-deep drill (Geovanny's work was rig operation and maintenance).

There was also footage of people controlling the computers and engineering operations, everything stored in completely move-able portacabins, ready to be shifted en masse to the next drilling site (once identified by the prospecting company). Occasionally messages appeared on screen (whilst the soaring, panpipe muzak continues), thanking "the families" for supporting their loved ones – the workers – in living the life that they do. This was framed as the workers/men making personal sacrifice for their families (no mention of communities), and as a noble, self-less act which requires strength-of-character, physical strength, and determination.

Geovanny worked for Nabors Industries Ltd, a USA/Bermuda-based drilling

contractor engaged in fossil-fuel extraction throughout the world. After a couple of years with them, he had found a job for his younger brother, Carlos, with the same company. I was about to ask about this when he pre-emptively explained the process by saying “I get on well with my bosses.” He and his brother worked on different rigs (#609 and #794 respectively) and the rigs were distant from each other, hidden far apart beyond shrouds of *bosque*/forest. Though they both followed 14-7 shift-schedules, their time off generally did not coincide, and the time they spent back home usually didn’t overlap.

Without family responsibilities of his own (he told me he could happily wait a few more years before seriously thinking about getting married), Geovanny saw the sacrifices involved in his line of work differently to the Nabors Co. Christmas DVD. Rather than sacrificing close connections with immediate family members, he felt the greatest interruption came in the form of not being able to continue his past work with youth groups in and around San Isidro. He lamented how his work schedule meant he was no longer as ‘active’ as before, and that when he worked as a youth-group-leader he “felt I was doing what I want to be doing now.”

Being ‘active’ he framed in terms of being a part of the ‘organizing process’ that both structured and typified action at the community-level. Describing the importance of this process, he grew animated, and tried to make me understand that: “We need to organize. Organize to make demands, and organize to defend – to defend ourselves, all of us, against what we’re being forced to do and to become. Life here has changed so much, and in my lifetime.” Being ‘active’ also meant taking responsibility and, in doing so, to take on ‘leadership’ – something he drew influence in from diverse sources: “*liderazgo*... if you fall down, pick yourself up. Have no fear: die defending our land, our culture. I’ve been reading about Ché [Guevara] too... San Isidro youth today don’t think like this... but they should. As for *liderazgo* – with Nabors we get training – and I could use this in work with the community, with other communities too. Leadership is ‘easy’. We are taught: ‘we are... who are we? We are Nabors Ecuador!’ Now, now we need to match this thinking [here in San

Isidro], to use this thinking: ‘we are Panzaleo!’⁴⁹”

He went on to describe feeling torn between earning an income and studying more, between his job and going to college to study forestry and botany – the latter out of a yearning for more prolonged, professional (and paid) work with youth-groups or within his community. Geovanny was hardly alone in confronting these issues, in balancing his emotional (and existential) beliefs and preferences with the immediate pressures to achieve financial independence through wage labour employment – though he tended toward seeing his oil-industry job more as a means to an end (to further study) than as the ‘only option’ that Freddy Chancusi described, above. Nonetheless, immediate economic imperatives (though he had no family to support) were in conflict with his own desires for work that would allow him to not only stay closer to home more of the time, but also to engage directly with the people who would soon be responsible for ensuring community organising continued in San Isidro, and thus to address the foreseeable future. Negotiating these various, crossing paths of value and morality provoked equally varied responses – and on occasion found San Isidro’s president used as an exemplary type.

Impacts and Divisions

Another trip to Pujilí, another bus-ride, another chance to bump into Don Efraín and chat. Faced with his own difficulty in finding a job, no longer receiving calls offering him work in *el Oriente*, he was especially thankful that his son – Fabian, mentioned above – had managed to find work there. This meant Fabian could raise his family in San Isidro. Don Efraín voiced concerns about another young man who had stayed in the area, though – someone who had refrained from following his own father into a

⁴⁹ ‘Panzaleo’ is a term used to refer to Indigenous people in Cotopaxi province – it is the Indigenous *Pueblo* of the region, and part of the Kichwa *Nacionalidad*/Nationality. Kichwa is one of 14 Indigenous *Nacionalidades* recognised in Ecuador, made up of different *Pueblos* each most closely associated with particular provinces (here in brackets): los Pastos (Carchi); Otavalos, Karanquis, Natabuelas y Kayambis (Imbabura); Kitucaras (Pichincha); Panzaleos (Cotopaxi); Chibuelos, Salasacas y Kisapinchas (Tungurahua); Warankas (Bolívar); Puruháes (Chimborazo); Kañaris (Cañar and Azuay); Saraguros y Paltas (Loja) - (CONAIE 2010a/b). *Pueblos* may be united and distinguished by sharing different institutions, traditions, and territories in common, whilst *Nacionalidades* tend to be more acutely linked to shared, distinct languages or cosmologies (Becker 2011b: 5; Macas 2009; Walsh 2009).

job with *los petroleros*. He felt these actions compromised the community-president's prospects.

Milton Guamán, 26 years old when elected as president during the biennial elections in 2011, was recognised as an active and vocal member of the community. From a young age, he had worked both with groups for *jovenes* and with the *directiva*, and more recently as the elected vice-president of OPIJJ (giving him significant responsibility in this representative body across the range of its 15 communities). He was known by name in the area as a reliable, and dedicated, individual. Don Efraín, however, felt that Milton's public service, his work for and dedication to the community, came at a price: "no one is paying him for that – for his work as community-president – not for his role in OPIJJ either. He needs to think about this. His brother – his younger brother – must be earning a grand a month, easy – in the *Oriente* where their Dad, Don Stalin, works... Milton [still] doesn't have any profession, or any way of earning money."

Milton himself was unwavering, and unapologetic, in his dedication to work for the community. He also took this commitment further, rhetorically. On one occasion, he offered a short speech of thanks for the efforts of the 90 or so gathered *compañeros* at a weekend-long *minga* in the páramo. Echoing Myriam's words from the previous week, he asked the audience to pause and reflect on the natural beauty of the landscape and on the efforts of ancestors who had fought to win rights to this land. Then he added that some thought should be given to indigenous communities elsewhere in Ecuador whose own beautiful lands were currently blighted and poisoned by the activities of the *petroleros* – issues and events that were recognised nationally, though all too frequently filtered through distorting media channels (Amazon Watch 2011; High 2013; DW 2013).

In the following days, even sympathetic friends said that he shouldn't have so publicly criticized the employers – and by extension, the [working] lives – of so many San Isidro residents. More privately, when asked about these criticisms of his own critique, he told me he stood by it, that he wasn't criticizing (*hablar mal*), as

such: “I know. People must work. I see that. I wouldn’t speak harshly against my own father, my own family, my neighbours, friends and *compañeros* – but I believe this. This is how we struggle, together. Far away, and near. I’m not going to close my eyes.”

Difference At Home

Work, employment, ambition and obligation created further divisions and distinctions, not only between view-points or between families, but within the latter as well. As Don Efraín mentioned, above, not migrating permanently away from San Isidro secured family life and ties in the one place, and provided a desired consistency and stability amidst broader patterns, and experiences, of uncertainty. Whilst Rodrigo (in Rayoloma) drew a comparison between *indígenas* and *campesinos*, more usually (and in official documents, such as the National Census) the options for identity-definitions were ‘indigenous’, ‘mestizo’, or ‘blanco’. These had been adopted for an ongoing internal research project in San Isidro, looking at the household economy in San Isidro. The idea was that gathering this kind of census data would be useful in applying for funds (both non-governmental and state-based). A number of times I accompanied those conducting the questionnaires. For many people, questions of identity were anything but straightforward or fixed. Variations and differences of opinion cut across employment practices, sartorial choices, wealth and mobility.

Discussions in the house of Sra Juana and Don Gonzalo Guamán focused on the life and activity of Washington (age 27), the eldest of their nine children. Straight away, his mother described him as *mestizo*. When asked why, the term (so divisive and problematic in politics throughout Latin America, v. Chapter 7) was understood as an adopted concept: “We are his parents. Of course, *we* are indigenous, but him – I suppose he is more mestizo... [why do you say that?]... well, he works in the city, he travels away to the city, lives there, works there [for the water company], most of the time he is away...”. Their other children, still of school age or living at home, were entered under the ‘indigenous’ entry.

This story was recounted, anonymously, and discussed with other people working on the questionnaires later that day. Milton was as surprised by it as anyone, and asked who the family in question was. At first, Myriam, who had conducted the interview, said she'd rather not name names. In response, Milton tried to guess who it might be, asking questions aimed at identifying them: "do they do things for the community?" Later, Myriam relented, and it was noted that describing Washington as *mestizo* was perhaps especially surprising since he would still, when in San Isidro, contribute time to communal projects. Though affected by his absence, his participation in community activity was still noticeable, in ways which would not be said, for example, of Geovanny. What someone *did* whilst at home said more about them than their line of work, income, or place of permanent residence. Roughly, if people were willing to act (and were seen as continuing to act) like someone who was 'indigenous' (eg. by participating in communal life, even if doing so quite rarely), then they were (regarded as being) 'indigenous.'

Generational divides were the primary source of differences in self-identification, however, and again they were linked also to action, employment and aspiration. Glenda, who ascribed San Isidro's 'survival' to oil money (above) also queried the census, adding that she would definitely describe herself as 'mestizo' – even though she still lived in San Isidro, her father (Don Gonzalo) was employed by MICC, and her mother (Sra Nicolasa) maintained the family's small-holding: "Me, and my siblings, we don't farm – not like my mother farms – working in the fields, all day, every day. Looking after the animals. Looking after all of us! For us, it's just not like it is for her." Sra Nicolasa, like virtually all women, was primarily responsible for both the running of the household and for agricultural work – distinguished as work done 'at home,' as opposed to paid work or work done 'away/outside.' Whilst Sra Rosa and Sra Juana, above, still had children living at home to help, the vast bulk of work in their San Isidro plots was done by them – and returning migrant husbands were expected to compensate for their recent absences by sharing in this.

With questions of self-identification varying so markedly within families, San Isidro

was also being ‘redefined’ internally. This cut across previously understood boundaries of both class and identity, parallel to political shifts at the national scale (Pallares 2002). Diverse ‘identity movements’ throughout the world have, since the 1970s, expressed a ‘major and systemic transformation of the hegemonic order of the world’ (Friedman 2007: 427), a trend that Ecuador’s Indigenous Movement fits within. Whilst national politics was re-oriented around such an ‘intensification and politicization of identification’ (ibid.), over the same span of years, questions of identity had also intensified *within* communities like San Isidro. Just as identification tends to ‘produce opposites’ (in the form of others, the outside world, the wealthy classes, etc), it also refashions histories, and often in ‘mythical terms’ by means of ‘a before and after’ (Friedman 2007: 428). Within families, one such refashioning emphasised generational divides. Observations like those of Glenda reinforced the idea that members of her generation, starting families and establishing households of their own, were faced with an unprecedented mix of both promise and poverty (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000; Ferguson 1999). However, this same generation, fulfilling adulthood in a period of time ‘after’ regular remigrations had become an established facet of home life for many families, were also part of increased activity that fell precisely between ‘promise’ and immediate conditions of ‘poverty’ – that of the near future.

IV. Conclusion: Repopulating the Near Future

The particular arrangements of labour migration in San Isidro had been made available to a new generation through kinship connections, and had expanded along those same routes. These regular remigrations, with their cycles of presence and absence, depended on the support of wives and families who were burdened with an ever-larger share of the household’s agricultural work and childcare. Migration patterns had, then, radically altered the structure of family life for many households in San Isidro. The economic impacts, meanwhile, had effects that went beyond the bounds of individual families.

Although there had been precedents – some community-members travelling away to

work in coastal plantations following Land Reform during the 1960s and 70s – the extent of labour-migration in/from San Isidro had undeniably intensified during (and since) Ecuador's oil boom. The same can be said of the emerging 'class differences' between those who now had significant expendable income, and those who did not. These differences were borne out through consumption patterns, employment types and agricultural practices. They also impacted emotionally as different (and at times conflicting) ideas emerged about valuable work and virtuous endeavour. Such changes shaped personal and collective identities, redrawing relationships between local communities, and within families.

The impacts of migration are mediated by conditions in home communities (Durand & Massey 1992) and by the political, economic and environmental context that constitutes 'home' for migrant workers (Jokisch 2002: 546). The case of San Isidro, however, reflects how the impact of 'remittances' reaches beyond economic restructuring (cf. Kyle 2000; Miles 2004; Swanson 2010), and how collective responses to these impacts are not limited to finding ways to rekindle "affective ties" within a community (Wibbelsman 2009; Bretón 2008; van Cott 2008). The particular migration practices that had become established in San Isidro were distinct, and marked the community out among neighbouring communities (who typically did not have access to the same channels of employment). However, a state of economic liminality persisted, affecting communities throughout the region, whereby the majority of migrant labourers and their families experienced the various social costs of marginal labour in exchange for minimal material compensation (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 5). The form and location of work available has changed over time, whilst this structural 'positioning' has been 'redefined' rather than altered (Johnson 2004). The labour market continues to become increasingly precarious (O'Neill 2013) – in line with the 'evacuation of the near future' (Guyer 2007) that national political rhetoric and economic activity exacerbates. In this context, there are families in San Isidro who are making work 'work' (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999: 24), supported by communal action which itself is bolstered by the effects of not only labour-related income, but also time.

The patterns of '14-7' work for migrants had a distinct impact on the organisation of communal life in San Isidro (its impact on the community assembly is explored further in the following chapter), and affected community action in a number of ways: (i) income from work done elsewhere had increased the resource base of San Isidro as a whole, which had in turn supported projects undertaken as a community, having the 'virtuous circle' effect of boosting its reputation as a 'successful' community; (ii) regular remigrations delivered the availability of labour for communal work which otherwise might not have existed – one week in three (for many younger, working-age men) could, in theory, be put to use; (iii) these regular, relatively short 1-week spells of time 'at home' were experienced in a somewhat 'compressed', intensely valued form – which allowed those returning to re-engage socially through participation in communal work, and fostered an enthusiasm for that work. The temporal frames shaping these dynamics both informed and derived from a clear contrast between the experience of most migrant jobs and the 'shared, un-commodified work on shared, un-commodified land' that characterised communal work at home (Chapters 2 & 3).

The relationship, then, between labour migration and the continuation of collective projects in San Isidro was based in the combination of work to address 'immediate needs' and action that involved planning, struggling, and 'reconfiguring' the arrangements of everyday life in light of these various demands (Guyer 2007: 409, 416). Paid employment had become an integral component of communal action within San Isidro. Income generated by labour migration alone, however, would have been insufficient for the task of sustaining these efforts. Only when combined with concerted, collective action 'at home' was the full impact or potential of increased migration realised, in this regard. Efforts to secure communal life in San Isidro remained at the heart of the combination of work that addresses immediate needs, and action that 'repopulates' the near future.

5

Decision-Doing: The Asamblea, Form and Gesture

Resolving disputes and settling anger at the behaviour of drunken teenagers. Planning next week's *minga*. Electing which seven individuals will form the *directiva* (community council) for the next two years. Devising a collective, legal response to a violent attack on a young resident in San Isidro. The *asamblea comunitaria* (community assembly) discussed and decided upon a wide range of issues and questions. An organizational form adopted from the Indigenous Movement, with a history and significance of its own, it was considered to be the 'highest authority' (*la máxima autoridad*) in these decision-making processes. It met regularly, and sometimes held emergency *reuniones*/gatherings and, in theory, its decisions emerged from the combined wills and expressed ideas of an assembly of all registered community members.

Like *mingas*, participation in the *asamblea comunitaria* was a form of coordinated action that worked toward specific ends and objectives. In doing so, the *asamblea* deliberated, and generated, common concerns and priorities. In Lambek's (2013: 144) terms, such 'consequences' are the 'primary outcomes' of 'doing': forms of ethical value as distinct from the 'utilitarian' value of 'making' involved in production. This distinction rests on the idea that "ends and means are conjoined in ethical value and separated in utilitarian or market value" (Lambek 2013: 142). With this in mind, I use this chapter to explore the process of the *asamblea* in practice, and focus on the relations, commitments, promises and compromises that constitute this form of 'doing.'

I use Agamben's idea of 'gesture' and Arendt's concept of the 'space of appearance' to examine the relationships between individual contributions, the setting of shared goals, and the various conflicts encountered by people acting together within the *asamblea*. I draw on different gatherings where decisions made through these

processes had a significant influence on future actions and decisions: authorising the selection of community council (*directiva*) members; and devising a communal response to an act of violence (seeking restorative justice). I also look at the history of community councils in the highlands, to illustrate their relation to broader patterns of political action and indigenous organizing. Working to achieve the authority of the *asamblea comunitaria*, to bring its influence into being, became both a method and an objective of the assembly in action. The *asamblea comunitaria* was a definitive, constitutive element of collective activity in San Isidro. Echoing the above analysis of *mingas* (Chapter 3), I argue here that the practice of the *asamblea comunitaria* adopts an established form for particular ends and, in the process, reinforces shared notions of the purposes and possibilities of cooperative action.

I. Elections and the *Directiva*

The date had been set more than a month in advance, although it's always in September and everyone was well aware of an election being due – it had been two years since the last one. Though there was no great surprise to the re-appearance of the community elections, there was still a degree of uncertainty surrounding them. As the 17th approached, people in conversation would acknowledge the importance of finding out who would be selected as members of the *directiva*. Open speculation was kept to a minimum, however. I very rarely heard names mentioned (one exception being that of the young man who became president).

When the day itself came, preparations began early. Milton arrived in his family's truck and a few of us loaded it up with some of the scrap wood, defunct gas cookers and broken benches that had been taking up space in a corner of the *casa comunal*. Others brought wooden pews out of the chapel next door and into the meeting-house. Once there, they were arranged (along with the usual flat benches) in long orderly rows facing one long wall (rather than around the edges of the room, as they would normally be placed). This was to accommodate more people than the number attending the average meeting of the *asamblea*. There were *reuniones*/gatherings involving the *asamblea* throughout the year – usually once a month – but today's

kind of meeting only happened at election, and included presentations and reports from outgoing members of the *directiva*, covering activities during the last two-year session, as well as discussion of future plans. Anyone registered on the list of 92 *socios* (community members) was expected to vote⁵⁰. There were usually closer to forty or fifty people at a regular meeting of the *asamblea*.

Other people brought firewood for use in the school kitchen next door, since everyone would have to be fed – twice. After all, there was a lot of ground to cover in these special sessions: a good number of issues to air and opinions to be heard. With scheduled breaks (at lunch and dinner) for communal meals (eaten perched on benches in the cafeteria or on the grassy playground just outside), the day's proceedings lasted from around 9am till gone 1am – sixteen hours.

A projector (borrowed from the local OPIJJ offices) cast an image in the middle of the long wall which everyone was facing – ready for the presentations – and to one side there was a table and chairs. From here, the community secretary (keeping minutes) and people chairing different parts of the session would oversee things. A few final preparations were made. Any remaining bits of building wood or spare lengths of pipe that had previously been stacked in a corner were lifted up and stored in the rafters along with those that had been there for a while. The room was ready.

Regular meetings tended to start in the afternoon around 4pm, though sometimes later. This meant that those who were working nearby could do a full morning's work (and most of the rest of the day's chores) before attending. This would still be too early for people working in Latacunga or elsewhere within range of a daily commute, but since even those regular sessions would often last eight hours, a compromise on start-time had to be reached. The early start of the *elecciones reunión*, meanwhile, meant that people arrived dressed only for that, rather than wearing their

⁵⁰ Due to work commitments outside of the province, not everyone was able to attend the meeting itself. A few voted by nominated proxy. Due to ongoing conflicts, a number of households that were part of the Toapanta family did not participate in elections. Only a very small number of votes were not cast due to nonattendance. *Socios* were typically household-representatives, but could also include named individuals. For example, someone who was unmarried and living with their parents could register as a *socio* in their own right.

working clothes. Looking around you could see many more of the small red pin badges, the mark of more expensive hats. Lots of folk came prepared for the long haul. Most of the older women had brought knitting materials with them. Someone else had thought to bring along a guitar. Later, whilst people queued to cast their votes, and soon after as the votes were being counted, it was getting late and energy levels were dropping. Prof Olmedo broke from his chairing duties and entertained us with a couple of songs (Fig.15). Part review and part popular vote, the day included annual reports on actions completed over the last two years, a summary of financial accounts, discussions on future plans for the community, and the election of a new *directiva* (community council). Before things concluded, all seven positions on the *directiva* had been filled.

Reluctant Will

Rocío Simaluisa had finished her presentation on her experiences of working with a hydroponic agriculture project in northern Perú. With Myriam Allauca, she outlined a similar plan for San Isidro, part of proposals for future activities in *desarrollo comunitario* (community development). Milton, among others, had stood up afterward and spoken out in favour of the plan. He later kept quiet, though, whilst others discussed his nomination for president.

The process of making nominations for various positions in the *directiva* began in the afternoon. It wasn't a shock to most people that Milton was nominated to be president, despite the fact that he was the youngest member of the current *directiva*. He had been the '*Dirigente de territorio, riquezas naturales y desarrollo comunitario*' (Coordinator for Land, Natural Wealth and Community Development) for the last two years, and he was generally well known for his work and dedication in community affairs. Not everyone agreed with his nomination, however.

His mother, Sra María, took the opportunity to speak out before the shortlist of names was passed by general assent. Even though the day's proceedings took a long time, if someone had a point to make it was important to act reasonably quickly.

Precisely because working through the presentations and voting procedures could take many hours, those charged with facilitating the meeting were keen to speed through the lengthy agenda as quickly as possible. For this, the *directiva* had chosen the school headmaster Prof. Olmedo to chair proceedings. He had performed the same role at the last elections two years previously. He was well liked and respected and, since he lived elsewhere (in Chugchilán, in another district) and had no family in San Isidro, he was considered to be a relatively neutral ally of the community as whole. He pushed for agreement on the nominations, and not simply with one eye on the clock. He also reminded everyone present of what it said in the *estatuto* (community constitution): “So, are we in agreement? ...everything depends on the majority [vote] of those in the Community Assembly... you [gathered here today] are the highest authority in making this decision” (*¿estamos de acuerdo? ...todo depende de la mayoría de los assembleístas... ustedes son la máxima autoridad para tomar esta decisión*).



Figure 15 – Prof. Olmedo (l) entertains everyone with a song during a break in proceedings at the elections *reunión*. To the right of the frame, Sra Avelina is knitting an *higra*.

Before things were settled, however, Sra María addressed the gathering of around 90 *compañeros*, and urged them to reconsider. Her son was still young. Maybe he could help in other ways. Perhaps elect him next time. Her words were heard, and met little resistance, but also little response. Only Don Alcides, who had been the first to nominate Milton initially, spoke out – and then only briefly – in support of his suggestion. From under his blue cap, branded in white with the words ‘Mishan Services’ (a catering contracting firm in *el Oriente*), he pointed to the fact that Milton was someone people thought was honest, and *dedicado*/devoted/dedicated. By the end of the day, Sra María’s requests had been dissolved in the voting process, and Milton had been elected community president. With one vote per household, he received 51 votes. With 31 votes cast for her in the same ballot, Myriam Allauca then became vice-president. Don Adán, whose own nomination was also disputed (as we shall see below), was later voted in to the role of ‘*Dirigente de educación intercultural, juventud, ciencia e investigación*’ (Coordinator for Intercultural Education, Youth, Knowledge and Research). Individual pleas and preferences had been revealed and discussed, encountering various disputes along the way and, ultimately, had to capitulate to the final decision.

Candidate nominations were made vocally, publicly, and were agreed upon by consensus. In this sense, the selection of council-members was both authored (suggested, debated, finalised) and authorised (settled by popular vote) by the gathered *asamblea*. ‘Consensus’ came when no further objections were raised or remained unaddressed. As Prof Olmedo reminded everyone, this majority will of the *asamblea comunitaria* was the final line drawn under any decision that was to be made. Elected representatives, as a result, were charged with implementing decisions that had been previously agreed collectively by ‘everyone’ in the *asamblea*. Unsurprisingly for any system that aims to cater to diverse needs and priorities, the process was far from straightforward.

Most, but not all, of the nominees took their turn to speak out against their nomination, for a whole range of different reasons. In some cases, these pleas were submitted by other people on behalf of the nominee. In only one case did the

outcome change as a result.

There's the sense that this was merely a performance of politeness, slightly self-deprecating behaviour that would match that of a good *compañero/a* who didn't consider themselves to be an especially deserving kind of character, nor someone a bit too suspiciously keen to move themselves into a position of influence (however limited that position might be – there were few perks to being a member of the *directiva*, especially given the demands on one's time). The problem with this explanation is not only that the positions carried with them little by way of incentive, but also that it is at odds with another, more important key characteristic of people who would be described as good, or committed, *compañeros*. People who were especially well-regarded were not self-effacing characters, but precisely those whose commitment to collective endeavours didn't seem to wane no matter what personal priorities and battles they were negotiating.

It's not true, however, that there were no reasons at all to be elected. Those who had fulfilled their duties successfully were well regarded, and those who had worked especially hard (perhaps completing a significant project or representing San Isidro in regional protests or mobilizations) were casually shown gratitude and respect. In more everyday settings, an extra degree of authority and influence accompanied contributions to *asamblea* debates coming from former member of the *directiva*.

Still, there were also people who maintained good relations with their neighbours, and with the wider community, without ever being members of the *directiva*. There were other ways in which people gained 'influence,' a point I return to below. Here, it serves only to underline the fact that these displays of reluctance were not a necessary stage in the process of getting elected. I didn't hear anyone say anything to suggest that they thought any the less of Myriam for keeping quiet after her nomination for president, or of Oswaldo Toapanta for not publicly objecting to his nomination for the role of Secretary. Indeed, Myriam went on later that day to be elected vicepresident.

It struck me that these pleas, asking for names to be withdrawn from the shortlists of nominations for particular posts, were genuine, and were based on recognition of the *asamblea comunitaria*'s binding authority. Everyone knew that the final vote was final, that there would be no going back, and speaking up before any votes were cast was the last chance for someone to stop themselves being elected, against their will – or at least to stop themselves being elected into a position that they would only very reluctantly volunteer to take up.

The one instance where these kinds of requests were successful in changing the course of events came when Don Adán Rojas responded to his nomination (he was the second, Milton the first) for the role of president. Perhaps prematurely (there were still hours of the process still to work through) Prof Olmedo had made jokes about how slowly names were being proposed. He urged people to speak up, speak freely: “This is what we’re trying to do, right? [So] that the *asamblea* can choose, or find [a candidate] – so we can carry on in an organised fashion. And so I, I would ask, because it seems, seems that we’re reflecting – a lot! [*parece que estamos mucho reflexionando*].”

Space of Appearance

This gathering of the *asamblea comunitaria* had created a space in which participants were invited to ‘distinguish’ themselves, or to be ‘conspicuous’ (Arendt 1958: 218) in communal affairs, and thus to both contribute to, and create, a public realm (Arendt 1961; Benhabib 1996). One of the critical distinctions Arendt draws between *action* (in the definition I have developed: a mode of togetherness which generates different kinds of ethical and material value) and forms of activity that are possible in isolation (*labour* and *work*) is the fact that *action* is judged by its ability to ‘disclose the identity of the agent’ (Arendt 1958: 180; Arendt 1968: viii). It is thus in action and speech, in interacting with others through words and deeds, that individuals ‘reveal who they personally are and affirm their unique identities’ (d’Entrèves 1994: 73). As discussed earlier (Chapter 1), these ideas have since been developed in two different directions. One emphasises the *expressive* elements of such public action

(focused on idealized or ‘heroic’ acts, celebrating the individual), the other focusing on *communicative* action (which operates through togetherness, fostering new relationships between acting subjects) (d’Entrèves 1994: 98). When and wherever people are ‘sharing words and deeds,’ the “space of appearance” comes into being (Arendt 1958: 199).

The ‘space of appearance’ is a social space, event or exchange – created in action – where “I appear to others as others appear to me” (Arendt 1958: 198). Action, then, not only has “the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all” but is “the one activity which constitutes it” (ibid.). For Arendt, the space of appearance “predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized” (Arendt 1958: 199). This may seem to discount the practice of the *asamblea comunitaria* from being considered in such a way since, as we shall see, the *asamblea* is based in a formalised arrangement of the public realm, as part of the Indigenous Movement. However, it is in this very relationship – between the formal structure of public deliberation, and how people engage with and create that ‘space’ – that we can examine the relative merits and lasting appeal of the *asamblea comunitaria*. I suggest the idea of the *asamblea* as an organizational form is changed in practice, testing relationships between individuals, and transforming the issues and concerns that people work together to address. In the actions of people connected by “mutual promise and common deliberation” (Arendt 1963: 214), the effective functioning of a prescribed arrangement becomes a goal in itself, and a form of ‘social value’ (Widlok 2004) that people work together to create.

The *asamblea comunitaria* works toward particular goals whilst also generating common concerns and priorities (ethical value). At the same time, the relationship between the *asamblea* in action, and the creation and constitution of the *asamblea* itself, involves a blurring of means and ends: the effective realisation of the *asamblea comunitaria* is both its objective, and the means with which to achieve it. This it shares with Arendt’s *space* since “the space of appearance must be continually recreated by action; its existence is secured whenever actors gather together for the purpose of

discussing and deliberating about matters of public concern, and it disappears the moment these activities cease” (d’Entrèves 1994: 77).

The *asamblea* thus creates a public space where new relations – working toward a common goal – are initiated and encouraged, and which involves the ‘disclosure’ of individual lives and concerns. The ‘authority’ of the *asamblea*, however, means that those who it elects are then personally responsible for completing very different kinds of activity: not only attending more regular meetings of the *directiva*, but also keeping accounts, registers, writing letters and *planificaciones* (making plans). In other words, they are then charged with *labour/work* of various kinds, conducted in isolation or in smaller groups, and separate from the public realm of *action*.

Acting and speaking are also definitive in the formulation, and revelation, of personal identities. These are markers of identity that are distinct from, say, physical characteristics such as the shape of the body, or the sound of the voice, both of which ‘appear without any activity of their own’ (Arendt 1958: 179). In Arendt’s model, the active ‘disclosure of identity’ is contrasted with forms of distinction that more readily associate the idea of disclosure (of the self, and of the self in relation to an ‘other,’ whether divine or neighbourly) as revealing ‘strangeness’ (Nancy 1991: 124). Individual identity is instead rooted in need and needs, and revealed through words and deeds (Arendt 1958: 175). That is, human beings are ‘distinguishable’ from one another as a result of speech and action which are attempts to articulate the personal range of desires and inclinations that are more complex and numerous than any ‘immediate identical needs’ we might share in common with those around us (Arendt 1958: 175). ‘Distinction’ here is the correlative of ‘equality,’ and together they constitute ‘human plurality’ as a ‘basic condition of both action and speech’ (Arendt 1958: 175). The process of deliberation thus involves reflection (Caton 2013: 166) and the interplay of (i) personal will and ‘distinct’ or ‘particular’ perspectives (Feldman 2013: 138), and (ii) shared, social expectations or demands (Parekh 2008: 106).

Paired with distinction in this ‘plurality,’ ‘equality’ here is not a denial of difference. It is not meant to imply universality or the ‘sameness’ that is attached to the familiar events of birth and of death (Arendt 1958: 215). Nor does it deny the ‘boundless’ ubiquity of power. Arendt emphasises the relational emergence of power (and how tyranny emerges through dual forms of isolation – between tyrant and subjects, and between subjects) in that it is “dependent upon the unreliable and only temporary agreement of many wills and intentions” and “cannot be possessed like strength or applied like force” (Arendt 1958: 201-2). Power is also, however, described in terms of what keeps people together once a moment of action has passed, what is kept alive in subsequent forms of ‘organization,’ and what is limited only by ‘the existence of other people’ (Arendt 1958: 201; Jackson 2005: 43). If equality does not deny the ubiquity of power, it cannot deny the simultaneous ubiquity of *inequality* in power relations, and thus cannot be interpreted here in line with the more usual understandings of equality – in terms of justice, for example.

Indeed for Arendt, this is the case. *Equality* refers to a degree of similarity which makes it possible for people to “understand each other and those who came before them” and also to “plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them” (Arendt 1958: 175). It is, then, a similitude, rather than an equivalence – emphasising belonging to the same group rather than the absence of inequalities. Thus the household, as a “space of mutual interdependence for the sake of sheer life” (Lakoff & Collier 2004: 424) might remain the “center of the strictest inequality” (Arendt 1958: 32) whilst, in the public realm, *equality* extends only to the coincidence of shared histories and overlapping concerns for the future – not an absence of inequality (Arendt 1958: 215). The sense of ‘reluctant will’ described here in *asamblea* proceedings reflects this tension: there were distinct inequalities in the amount of time and effort different individuals were in a position to commit to. For this reason, people commonly objected to their nomination for a role within the *directiva*. Occasionally, this was due to the spells of absence associated with labour migration, as in the case of Don Adán whose name had been put forward for the role of community president during these elections.



Figure 16 – Eating dinner in the school dining room, part way through the elections *reunión*.

Assumed Roles

For a few minutes, there were no further nominations forthcoming after Milton's name had been put forward. Prof Olmedo again nudged the gathering toward speaking out and speeding up the process: 'is there no other candidate – are we just going to do it [now] by consensus?' (even though the role of president is always put to a vote, and so requires at least two candidates). Then Sra Avelina nominated Don Adán. This was noted in the minutes and his name added to the large sheet of paper that had been taped up on the wall. He was the next person to speak with his 'intervention,' and his words (and the subsequent exchange) capture a number of important themes, in the spirit of proceedings: respect for other people and for due process, ideas about the best routes forward for the community, the impact of migration and, from the chair, some humour.

Don Adán began: "It seems to me that... we're doing something that we don't need to do... we do this, and perhaps we're making a mistake... I came here today, because I knew we had to, to elect a president. At no point did I commit to... I shouldn't even be a candidate, much less president. Because – there are many

reasons... firstly – there are *jovenes* here who are ready, and who are studying and preparing more – if we don't give them an opportunity (*apertura*), to these younger people, we the older generation[s], for what it's worth (*valga lo que valga*) will regret it – if we don't give them this opportunity, we'll repeat the old mistakes, maybe, we'll lose direction, maybe. On the other hand, at this point in time – half of us are here, half of us away... for the needs of our family and – perhaps – perhaps also of our community – we leave, we migrate. I'd be doing wrong in accepting this, and – much worse – if I accepted, then the day I got offered work: I would have to leave – the community isn't going to pay me – so I have to leave and go to work. And so, for all these reasons, and with great respect to everyone here I'm presenting my wishes, *compañeros* – and so, I withdraw my name from this list.”

There was a slight pause, before Prof Olmedo prompted ripples of mirth by saying, “Thank you... but you can't withdraw your name!” The situation was not yet resolved. Don Adán then asked Sra Avelina to withdraw her nomination, and Prof Olmedo duly posed the question directly to her: “do you withdraw [your nomination] or not?” She replied, “[it's not true that] I'm doing this just to please myself [*por capricho hago eso - ¡no es eso!*]... *compañeros, compañeras*, we all know that... he is a *compañero* committed to the struggle [*un compañero de lucha*] – we all know it... what a shame, then, that my words have come to nothing.” Prof Olmedo spoke quietly to Don Manuel keeping minutes, “Yes – she withdraws her nomination.”

Milton then spoke up, picking up on part of Sra Avelina's speech which had also mentioned how successfully Don Adán had worked in the position of Coordinator for Education in times past. Rather than debating the withdrawal or not of the nomination, perhaps Don Adán should be put forward for his former role instead. People liked the idea. A loud murmur of assent rippled around the room. There was a pause, and in it no voice of opposition was raised. Despite his misgivings about regular, foreseeable spells of absence from the community, Don Adán accepted his former position (which disrupted the usual course of events slightly: normally, each round of voting followed a prescribed course, starting with the post of president, then working through all seven roles of the *directiva* in turn).

Prof Olmedo continued to encourage people to speak up with another nomination for president, and to consider ‘gender equality’ [*equidad de género*] in doing so. Before anyone did, Milton’s mother (Sra María) spoke up with her comments referred to at the start of this chapter: “I’d ask you all, everyone here, with respect to reconsider this nomination of Milton, my son, for the role of President – or Vicepresident – what I say is true for both... you know very well, he has worked, and he has studied – I’m not saying he can’t contribute at all... [but] please think of his age, he is still young and, I would say, in truth, I don’t think he should be doing this work. As his mother, I ask you this favour. It is a great responsibility. He would be a good president. Just not this time, not this year. He works with OPIJJ – that is enough. He has worked on the *directiva* – and has done a good job, which is a lot of work, two years, already. He can help in other ways... Nominate him next time, this is what I am saying. This is what I am asking, asking of you all.”

There were no direct responses to this, since she was not asking for his name to be withdrawn, only that people consider her wishes when casting their votes. It took a few more minutes of waiting and whispering, and a few more humorous prompts from Prof Olmedo (“Did someone say ‘me’?” “Come now... I want to go home!”) before Don Virgilio then nominated Myriam Allauca, describing her as dedicated and very experienced, despite her young age (24).

Sra Avelina (Llumiquinga) was herself later nominated, at first for the role of Treasurer (along with Porfirio and Juan Yasig). She quickly spoke up: “I can’t read or write – I would have to rely on my son (Patricio) to help me with the documents and letters, and he’s about to start work in the *Oriente*... I don’t think I will be able to do this job – you need to [be able to] read and write...” A response came from the floor – Sra Blanca (Rojas), a neighbour of Sra Avelina’s – full of praise, and emphasising her unique abilities (indeed, her renown) in the preparation and use of medicinal plants and treatments. In similar fashion to the election of Don Adán to the role of Coordinator for Education, this endorsement of Sra Avelina’s skills meant she was the sole nominee for the role of Coordinator for Health. This was put to the test

of general assent (no outstanding objections), and she was duly elected. This left Porfirio and Juan Yasig facing the vote for the role of Treasurer.

Again, the nominees raised vocal objections. Porfirio made the case that his current job with government department INFA meant he too had to spend time away from San Isidro for work. Added to that, he already did a lot of work anyway, extra to the duties of the *directiva* (in the past, as a signatory to documents as “*Asesor Comunitario*” [community adviser] when needed, when his input had been sought or certain connections of his put to use in favour of the community), and also through OPIJJ, campaigning with Cinco de Julio, and more. On behalf of Don Juan, who tellingly was absent (due to working away as a building-labourer), his wife Sra Rosa spoke up. Making a strong case for his name to be overlooked in the voting – if he’s not able to attend even these important elections, how can he take up the role of Treasurer? – she petitioned the gathering to think about the implications of this.

Left implicit were the other likely consequences of Don Juan being elected – that his duties would become her responsibility whenever he had to leave San Isidro for work. Due to the periodic absence from San Isidro of so many men of working age, a number of women had visibly had to take on different roles within the *directiva* at different times. In the case of Don Adán, his daughter Tannia (who was already active in the community, not as a member of the *directiva* but as an organizer of youth events and a local food initiative) would sign documents in his place. Betty Guamán had quickly worked through a steep learning curve, learning the essentials of book-keeping for when her father Don Gonzalo was away, which was often. Though regular migrant-labourers were sometimes not voted into a position in favour of someone with a more permanent presence in the community, this was not always the case. Indeed Don Manuel, who was taking minutes during this session as secretary, was himself often away working in *el Oriente*, and his wife Sra Pastora fulfilled the secretary’s duties in his absence, often helped by their teenage daughter Cyntia.

Not everyone was in a position to delegate their duties to others, or to ‘share’ them in

this way. Sra Nancy Rojas ran the village shop next door to the *casa comunal*, and that's where she was (preparing snacks for sale to *asamblea* attendees, and some of their children who had been coming and going from the meeting all day) when her name was put forward for the role of Secretary. Her daughter Josselyn quickly pointed out to everyone that 'she won't want to do this,' before running next door to warn her mother what was happening in her absence. Though still at high school, it was fitting that when all the newly elected members of the *directiva* lined up to thank the *asamblea*, it was Josselyn there in place of Sra Nancy (who juggled a part time job in Pujilí with running the shop) – in the following weeks and months I saw a lot more of Josselyn than her mother in the role of community Secretary. The public exchange in the election meeting had further revealed the personal circumstances of those involved. Elements of the lives and livelihoods of Sra Nancy and Josselyn had been discussed and considered in the *asamblea* in a way that would otherwise not have occurred, at least not in such a formal and public arena.

Decisions made by the *asamblea comunitaria* were, then, considered to be final and irrevocable. Once someone had been elected, the burden of responsibility fell to their family to fulfil the duties of their particular position. Whilst the process of the *asamblea* was intended to be open and inclusive – and consensus-led – the outcomes of the *asamblea* suggest that it is unlike an ideal type of authority that 'invites reply' or even entertains existential – at least, ethical – questions (Latif & Jeppesen 2007: 296). In fact, personal or individual pleas might be completely over-ridden. In this sense, the authority it exercised was an imposition on people – as a process it was 'endured' (Agamben 2000). Its authority might curtail an individual's freedom by binding them to the decisions formed and ratified by everyone in the *asamblea*.

As an organizational form and political ideal, the *asamblea comunitaria* had been adopted from the Indigenous Movement. The format, and expectations, were established: "Participation of the community members in decision making takes place at community council (*cabildo*) meetings. This means that community actions are governed by consent and discussion is held until consensus is reached... This process is slow and difficult, but it provides a firm basis for collective action once it

is achieved” (Macas et al 2003: 224). Similarly, the influence of CODENPE was clear in the community constitution (*estatuto*). This was a 16-page document detailing the organizational structure, constitution, legal status, aims and objectives of the *comunidad* and the duties of its members, of both the *directiva* and of the *asamblea comunitaria*⁵¹. The history of the *cabildo* (and its influence on the formation of a *directiva* in San Isidro) reveals how the form had been adapted and reused, in the process becoming a ‘social value.’

II. An Adopted Ideal: Access and Indigenous Councils

Legacy

In San Isidro, the *directiva* was modelled on the *cabildo* found elsewhere in the region, just as its status of *comunidad* corresponded with the more frequently found *comuna*. As a form of peasant organization, the present-day *comuna* can be traced from pre-colonial and colonial origins, as the result of “merging an Inka form of social organization (the *ayllu*) with that which the Spanish conquest imposed (the *comuna*)” (Becker 1999: 552). The role and significance of the *cabildo* within community life, however, had been established and gradually altered over a period of hundreds of years.

The *cabildo* has been described as ‘an invention of the colonial state’ which has since been ‘revamped’ by the post-colonial state in the 1930s and, more recently (since the 1980s), has been at the heart of rural activity in ways that were never anticipated in the original 1937 legislation (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 134). Viceroy Toledo’s reforms in the 1570s brought the Spanish crown’s attempts to ‘locate, enumerate, tax and control’ rural populations into sharp focus (Colloredo-Mansfeld

⁵¹ This document itself closes with reference to the authority of the *asamblea comunitaria*, and its power to change its contents. The final Article (#35) states that: ‘This Constitution can be reformed or dissolved by an absolute majority of the *asamblea general*, according to the needs and requests that strengthen unity, revive cultural identity as a community and an ancestral Indigenous people, and improve the standard of living of all its inhabitants.’

2009: 122). By including rules about who should lead these populations and stamping the *cabildo*-council model onto diverse settlements (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 123), these measures imposed strict limits on the ‘forms and content of native Andean contestation’ (Larson 2004: 41). Those limits, however, were always contending with the sheer diversity of the populations affected. Colloredo-Mansfeld makes the point that as communities adapted to the structure and practice of the *cabildo*, its operation multiplied in form and features – being tailored to the contours of local religious authority (Orta 2004), moral beliefs (Mayer 2002), or the management of irrigation systems (Gose 1994) among other forms of social interaction and stratification (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 123). Over time, local power holders were able to increase their control over indigenous communities, weakening the state control that had been sought (Yashar 2005: 91), until the relationship between state authority and local autonomy changed significantly again in the 1930s.

The *Ley de Organización de Regimen de Comunas* (*Ley de Comunas* / Law of The Commons), passed in 1937, was the result of a series of political strategies that sought to ‘modernize’ indigenous communities, to incorporate their residents into the a wider labour force not immediately under the control of a highland elite, and to reassert the authority of the state “under the guise of the ‘protector of Indians’” (Guerrero 1989; at Latta 2011: 120-1). The Law granted legal recognition to communities as *comunas* (or peasant communes), which became the smallest legal administrative unit of government (Latta 2011: 121), thus drawing a line of authority and organizational connection between national government and rural populations (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 17). There were key requirements involved in this process. To do so, residents had to define the boundaries of communally-held territory, elect a *cabildo* and president, and establish a list of inhabitants (ibid.). Though of course this Law did not “create Indian communities” (Becker 1999: 540), it is significant that “*terrenos comunales*” (communal land) were a necessary feature of the newly-recognized *comunas* (ibid.), and that the boundaries of communal land in many ways define *comunas* elsewhere in Ecuador (Uzendoski 2004), in contrast to

the situation in San Isidro. Here, organizational structures were a clearer indicator of the ongoing legacy of these reforms.

Reform

Almost echoing the sixteenth century Toledan reforms, the introduction of the *Ley de Comunas* brought about a number of unforeseen changes in addition to its proposed objectives, and gave rise to novel conflicts, divisions and opportunities (Yashar 2005: 89-90). In part, the fact that the Law was slow to take effect reflected just how weak state control had become in rural areas (prompting the need for the Law in the first place) – this was due to the extensive influence in different areas of three local power holders, viz. the landed elite and *hacienda* owners; *tenientes politicos* (state-endorsed political officers); and the Catholic Church (Yashar 2005: 91). Forming *cabildos* in the years following 1937 enabled indigenous communities (not living under an *hacienda* regime) to settle localised and internal conflicts and disputes without the involvement of the *teniente politico* or their indigenous intermediaries (*alcaldes*) as had previously been the case (Guerrero 1989; Yashar 2005: 90; at Latta 2011: 121).

Whilst this represented a new degree of autonomy, *comunas* had to be legally registered with the Ministry of Social Welfare (*Ministerio de Bienestar Social*; and, latterly, with the Ministry of Agriculture). As such, *cabildo* decisions could be vetoed by government representatives from either of those national agencies or from within local political authorities (Latta 2011: 121). Today, Ministry officials will still oversee elections in some *comunas* (as was the case in Comuna Tola Chica⁵²).

In San Isidro, by contrast, there was no such direct state involvement in the workings of the *directiva*, due to the fact that San Isidro had never been registered as a *comuna* with the Ministry of Agriculture. This situation continued up until the present day. The structure of the *cabildo* or *directiva* had, however, been adopted locally in the

⁵² Comuna Tola Chica was the indigenous *comuna* near Tumbaco where I lived with friends Rogelio and Martha for my first few weeks in Ecuador. It had been registered (with the Ministry of Social Welfare) since December 1944.

past, specifically in moments of action coordinated with other indigenous groups and formal political institutions. In 1944, an alliance was formed of what were referred to as the *dirigentes* (leaders) among those living and working on *haciendas* at Tigua, Juigua and Cuturibi. ‘Juigua’ here includes all three *haciendas* that had previously belonged to the one ‘Juigua Estate’ and which became Juigua Pequeña, Juigua San Isidro and Juigua San Antonio (OPIJJ 209: 54). This alliance, then, covered a large number of local communities. The larger community of Jatun Juigua de Yacubamba was one of the first to register as a *comuna*, and did so in 1966, when it appointed its own *cabildo* (ibid.).

The rights that this alliance of local *dirigentes* secured in 1944 with support from a lawyer based in Quito were not as extensive as those granted to new *comunas* under the 1937 Law. Still, the alliance gained legal support from the state to prevent certain practices from being carried out on the *haciendas* (such as regular lashings and imprisonment for the death of an estate animal), though many such practices continued (OPIJJ 2009: 58). The *cabildo* structure had been adopted by the *dirigentes*, all signatories to this *Contrato Colectivo* (‘Collective Contract’), as a means to engage with the legal system (ibid.). Years later, San Isidro had adopted the same structure, both when registered as an *Asociación* (from 1976) and, more recently, as a *comunidad* (with CODENPE, since 2009). In stories of the struggle against the *hacienda* and in the years before Land Reform in the 1960s, however, community leaders were referred to not as *dirigentes* but more usually as *cabecillas* (local leaders), which echoes accounts from other villages which were part of *hacienda* estates and not registered as *comunas* in their own right until long after 1937 (Larson 2004: 113). In San Isidro, then, the impact and influence of this history of the *cabildo* had been strongest in more recent years. It had also been filtered through the regional Indigenous organization (MICC) and shifts in indigenous political action since the 1980s.

In the highlands especially, *comunas* and *cabildos* became the ‘building blocks’ of a ‘national indigenous movement’ (Pallares 2002; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Zamosc 1994) alongside a ‘smaller number of peasant cooperatives’ (Latta 2011: 122). This

process of building the Indigenous Movement is dated variously from the 1960s to 1990s (ibid.) or, to a different extent, from the 1930s (Becker 2008). The importance of community councils to the interaction and collaboration of diverse communities across the highlands intensified in the years running up to 1992 (Yashar 2005). In particular, Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009: 134) identifies two trends from the 1980s onwards which both mobilised action within the Movement and re-established the centrality of *cabildos* within these political shifts.

The first of these two accounts tracks indigenous uprisings and a broad increase in coordinated political activism, often mobilised to address neoliberal reforms based in promarket ideologies (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 135). Those ideologies favoured decentralization and a shrinking role to be played by the state, and this atmosphere of cuts to state-funded programs coincided with a ‘devolution of power to local communities’ such that, whilst suffering a lack of support, those communities were then better positioned to coordinate and intervene politically (ibid. – see Chapter 6 for more on how this has affected San Isidro). The second trend highlights how NGOs and aid donors responded to these shifts, primarily supporting projects which ‘exhibited local leadership’ and effectively going ‘looking for Indians rather than just the poor’ (Bretón 2003) – the development industry converging on what it perceived to be Indianness (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 135). The *cabildo* became emblematic of this local leadership and ‘Indianness,’ and also a means of accessing these incoming resources.

In San Isidro, access to these visiting agencies was facilitated by the formation and legalisation of OPIJJ (formerly UOPICJJ) in 2000, which brought together a ‘union’ of 15 communities to form an OSG (*organizacion de segundo grado*, second-tier organization) that was instantly more recognisable to NGOs. At that time, San Isidro was still registered as an *Asociación* – this too operated through *un proceso democrático con la máxima autoridad que es la asamblea general* (a democratic process with the General Assembly as the highest authority), responsible for electing its own 7-person *directiva*. OPIJJ is coordinated by MICC and, as the provincial branch of the national Indigenous Movement, MICC expects to deal with

communities that operate through a particular structure, namely that of the community council (*directiva* in the case of San Isidro⁵³ or, *cabildo* elsewhere in the region), a structure itself derived from the national Indigenous Movement⁵⁴. The prescription of this structure suggests that it is not only a way to render communities ‘legible’ to one another, to outside agencies, and to their representative organisations, but also an ideal to be pursued. Once in use within a community, the *asamblea* process makes certain demands of those taking part and this, in turn, transforms a political or organizational idea into an esteemed practice, or ‘social value.’ As a form of ‘gesture,’ examined below, attempts to bring the *asamblea* into being simultaneously reinforce its importance and centrality to communal life (Widlok 2004: 58).

Gesture

The historical significance of the *asamblea* structure for community organizing, and its ongoing prescription within the Indigenous Movement, highlights how definitive a model it has been for structuring collective action within highland indigenous communities. Yet, even the more prescribed roles (of president, other members of the *directiva*) were shaped by the personal characteristics of those individuals. Those who were in a position of responsibility would still reveal their own perspectives and concerns, through their speech and action in the *asamblea*. Through participation – disclosure of the self in a context of collective decision-making – those taking part

⁵³ The seven positions in the *directiva* are: (i) President, (ii) Vice-president, (iii) Secretary (Coordinator for Minutes and Communication), (iv) Treasurer (Coordinator for Economy and Finances), (v) Coordinator for Land, Natural Wealth and Community Development, (vi) Coordinator for Families and Primary Health, (vii) Coordinator for Intercultural Education, Youth, Knowledge and Research. In San Isidro, three further positions are also decided upon, each filled by someone from one of three broad geographical sections of the community. As *vocal designado/a* (named spokesperson), their primary duty is to convey crucial information to all residents in their area (particularly dates and times of – or changes to plans for – meetings and mingas).

⁵⁴ Though supplemented by offices dealing specifically with Internal Affairs and subdivisions of broader departments, CONAIE itself has in the past adopted a similar structure for its *dirigencia* (*directiva*), comprising: President; Vice-President; Secretary of Territory, Natural Resources, Environment and Development; Secretary of Promotion and Organization; Secretary of Health and Nutrition; Secretary of Women and Family; Secretary of Education, Science and Culture (CONAIE 2008). Whilst describing the typical organization of Panzaleo (see below) communities in the region, CONAIE suggest this follows a similar structure: President, Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer and *dirigentes* appointed by the General Assembly (CONAIE 2010a).

were ‘supporting’ the *asamblea comunitaria* process. At the same time, they were bound by its decisions and outcomes. In this sense, they were ‘enduring’ that same process. In speech and action, an individual act ‘communicates itself as exemplary, as a singularity’ and yet is part of a process dependent on other people, and thus also involves a ‘withdrawal of singularity’ demanded by the collective process (Nancy 1991: 79).

For Agamben, ‘supporting’ and ‘enduring’ stem from the same form of action. Borrowing from Varro, he interprets them as different kinds of *gerere*, which means to carry or carry on, and hence to ‘support or endure’ (Agamben 2000: 56). When things are being endured and supported, this is the realm of action he identifies as *gesture* (ibid.). *Gesture* is distinct from ‘doing’ and ‘acting.’⁵⁵ Its distinctive feature is that, by supporting and enduring a process, *gesture* draws attention to the means by which actions are carried out: “The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such” (Agamben 2000: 57).

It is not just that people were both supporting and enduring the *asamblea* process, then, that makes participating in it resemble a form of *gesture*. It is also because gesture exposes the means, drawing attention to the process itself. That is, whilst those taking part ‘distinguish’ themselves and make their positions ‘conspicuous’ through their contributions, they simultaneously draw attention to the context they are acting within. The value of this form of recognition – of each other, and of the

⁵⁵ Agamben bases his understanding of *gesture* on a reading of Varro which describes three stages, or spheres, of action: *facere* (to make); *agere* (to act); *gerere* (to carry or carry on, hence to support or endure). Gesture corresponds to *gerere* (to support/endure). It is the realm of action that “breaks with the false alternative between ends and means that paralyzes morality” (Agamben 2000: 56). Similarly, this is what distinguishes Arendt’s notion of ‘action’ from labour and work. As such, Agamben’s ‘*agere*/to act’ is closer to Arendt’s notion of work (and *homo faber*), than it is to ‘action/*praxis*’ (which is not what one might expect from their English translations). Agamben sees *facere* (making) and *agere* (acting) as directly deriving from *poiesis* (production) and *praxis* (action) respectively, as in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This is the distinction from Aristotle’s work that Arendt, and Lambek, also adopt. In Agamben’s reading of Varro, however, *agere* (to act) still suggests action which is deliberate, perhaps fulfilling a specific role, in the way an actor brings a play into being by performing it, for example (whilst it is the playwright who is said to have ‘made’ the play). Varro clarifies that the real distinction to be made here is between *agere* (to act) and *gerere* (to carry/support/endure) (Varro: VI VIII 77 [1977: 245], at Agamben 2000: 55-6). The latter, *gesture*, is the only form of action that is not concerned with, nor defined by, means and ends – and this is precisely what, for Arendt, defines ‘action’ as distinct from labour and work. Similarly, for Lambek, ‘acts’ are ends in themselves since in the enactment ‘means and ends are not distinguishable’ (Lambek 2013: 148)

collective context being created – is circulated insofar as it tests and transforms the relationships and circumstances that constitute the *asamblea* in practice (Lambek 2013: 151). The speech and action of one individual person, acting among others, reflects back on the means that make such interaction possible. In this case, individual participation in the *asamblea* involved at once both disclosure of the self (Arendt 1958: 158) and reinforcement of the collective process that was being ‘supported and endured’ (Agamben 2000: 57). Highlighting the means (the process of the *asamblea*) also draws attention to its various purposes and possibilities. A gesture, in this sense, exhibits the potential of the context it occurs in: it is “communication of a communicability” (Agamben 2000: 58).

Self-disclosure, then, makes actors ‘conspicuous’ in human affairs (Arendt 1958: 218). When self-disclosure is pursued and performed in a prescribed context (the *asamblea*), it communicates something about the individual identity of the actor, and also about the limits and conditions of that context. The *gesture* of the suffering/enduring participant ‘exposes the means as means’ – that is, highlights the *asamblea* process as something that both (i) enables and gives rise to individual acts, and (ii) makes demands on participants in return. The idea of *gesture*, then, highlights the relational nature of action, since to be ‘conspicuous’ requires the presence of other people. Individual participation in the *asamblea* process doesn’t just reflect on and draw attention to the fact that it is a prescribed form of organizing, however. The *asamblea* is itself created by the coming together and sharing of those individual contributions. In the following section I explore further the links between individual circumstances and community action within the *asamblea comunitaria* process through an account of the *asamblea* as it met in direct response to a moment of crisis.

III. Authority as Authoring: Devising Restorative Justice

It was almost 4 o’clock on a Friday afternoon and I was sitting with a group of a dozen or so youngsters as they met for their weekly prayer session in the village chapel. The *catecismo*/catechism catered to four different groups of *catequistas*,

corresponding roughly with age and more explicitly to their stage in the preparations for First Communion. Without any adult supervision (Josselyn borrowed the chapel key kept by her mother, Sra Nancy, to let everyone in), each group had a youth-leader who was typically someone aged 13 to 16 or older and who had themselves completed the program, and were more than familiar with the ‘curriculum’. Once the allocated hour was up, the first group left, and Josselyn took over with an older group, formerly led by Carlos Alberto Rojas, who we’ll learn more about below.

That particular Friday, the young-chattering churchgoing silence was suddenly interrupted by a scream from the school’s siren. It went on. I didn’t instantly respond to its presence at this time of day – the afternoon – as an aberration. Everyone else in the room, however, responded to what had been signalled – an emergency – and prayer books were hastily placed down on promptly evacuated pews. Immediately outside, there was nothing to see. Before long the siren stopped, but there was no resuming the *catecismo* now, this interruption would last till answers were discovered. It was difficult to see who had had access to the school to raise this alarm, so one possible route to revelation there was closed. Books were scooped up and the chapel interior hurriedly tidied and returned to its usual dormant state, the door locked. Some youngsters gradually dispersed homeward, whilst other *compañeros* began to gather before going – with more agitation – out along the track that leads to the village’s main access track. The gist of this emergency was circulating in shocked whispers: “They’ve shot Alberto”.

I caught up with Don Rocendo in his camouflage sunhat as he tracked his slightly strained gait out over remnants of puddles, along to the ‘Four Corners’ crossroads. He had heard the same snippet: that Alberto had been shot. By the *hacienda* owner. I was aghast, but he and Sra María (wife of Don Efraín), who had caught us up – they were calmer, if not a little dubious (though still perturbed), better able to react in full only once they had seen “what has happened with our own eyes... there’s always something with that landowner – who knows what it is now. Always fighting, fighting...” Sra María told me.

Our steps scurried increasingly brisk and breathy. My phone rang. It was Myriam's voice. We got cut off. Then another number rang, but again no conversation happened. Finally I got back through to Porfirio – he told me to come down and “witness this – and bring your camera”.

That's all there was time for, apparently. The phonecall ended abruptly. Our little trio had grown into a small, inquisitive drove, making our way down the access track to the scene, we were told, of the alleged crime.

Vehicular access to San Isidro ran down a solitary, straight, single-lane track, its tufted verges marking the northern limits of the *hacienda* lands (v. Appendix 4 for an aerial image of the Hacienda at San Isidro). Dusty, pitted, and about a mile in length – from the Pujilí-Cusubamba road to San Isidro's Four Corners crossroads. Following it from one end to the other meant passing one after another of the *hacienda* fields, on your left as you headed toward the village. There were no protective or prohibitive fences, just intermittent shrubbery and occasional, partial rows of spiky *penko*/agave plants that plotted the marked and visible boundaries.

Only a handful of San Isidro abodes were placed north of (and adjacent to) the access track: everyone else, the vast majority of residents, made this journey on each entry and exit, whether by vehicle or on foot. There was a second, vaguely parallel path, where access was denied (by the *hacienda* owner) to all vehicles apart from those belonging to the *hacienda* owner (who had also threatened to deny even pedestrian use of this pathway). There were other more circuitous routes into and out of San Isidro (v. Appendix 4 for an aerial image of San Isidro, the track, the *hacienda* lands). One could cross the lunar-dry deforested slopes toward the southerly-neighbouring village of Santa Rosa de Cochaloma, and head for the road that way or, alternatively, cross the always-scorched former riverbed which marked a more formal boundary between San Isidro and Cruz Pampa immediately to the north – but each would add a mile or so to the journey.

As such, the main access track was both artery and incision. At once a dividing line, scoring the perimeter between hacienda land and community fields, and also a route that carried life and lives into and out of the village. Its familiar path welcoming energy-depleted souls back ‘home,’ or else ferrying migrants on their return-departure to faraway ‘work.’ It connected San Isidro to different parts of the world in such a way that it ‘changed whatever it came into contact with’ (Taussig 2009: 40). The side of this track became a fitting, if unusual, site for a *reunión* of the *asamblea comunitaria*, and the collective authoring of the community’s response to this incident.

Disturbance

We saw a gathering on the *hacienda*-side verge of the road, and a pick-up parked stationary blocking any traffic that might want to pass. It was Milton’s red Toyota. Behind it was another pickup – red and blue lights on its roof slowly blinking, a crest on its open driver’s door – no need to read “*Policía*” beneath it, nor the accompanying dictum, “*Servir y Proteger*” (To Serve and Protect). Before then, I had never seen on-duty police anywhere in the Alpamalag valley, never anywhere closer to San Isidro than in the town of Pujilí.

We arrived and greeted rows of faces streaked with consternation and some disbelief – but thankfully the news was relatively good: no one had been shot. Dogs were barking. I met a small group gathered around Porfirio. There was vice-president Myriam, Don Juan Yasig (community treasurer) and his wife Sra Rosa, a couple of children from Don Jaime’s neighbouring house – we were in and among dozens now assembled. *Compañeros*, neighbours, friends and relatives, and two young police officers in hi-vis green vests over sharp-pressed olive-green uniforms, in shiny black shoes and clutching walkie-talkies – and it was Alberto’s older sister Tannia who filled me in on the backstory:

“My Mum and Dad [Don Adán], were coming down from our fields up there [a mile or so uphill from where we were standing], after weeding there... they were bringing down the little animals – one horse and the sheep, only a few sheep – and

they were coming past this bit of the *hacienda* – as you can see there’s no protection, no fences, no *cabuyos*/agave-plants, no nothing... some of the sheep skipped over into the *hacienda*, so they went to get them back...”

Don Adán took over the tale:

“Sometimes [the sheep] go in there, no matter what you do... we were trying to get them out of there when there’s two shots ringing out from nearer the *hacienda* house – we look round and see the *hacienda*-landowner – I just wanted to apologize and calm him down – clear up the fact that we’re on our way home, not grazing there at all – but he’s there with his shotgun in his hands ready to shoot again, pointing it at me and hurling all kinds of insults at us, then he tries to hit me with the barrel and he pushed me – I’m still trying to tell him we’re not there grazing, but he didn’t get it – you know his name? He’s Mauro Javier Gallegos – he didn’t have the guts to shoot us – and he lunged at me with this great big shotgun, with the butt of the shotgun, but I ducked quickly and he only just missed me – he shoves me again, then he’s chasing off the animals...”

He’s called over to the police truck, and Tannia continued:

“My brother (Alberto) and I were in the house and we heard the shots so we came running out to see what was going on, and we could see things were dangerous and he’s insulting Dad, and as soon as he sees us he’s starting with the insults and pointing that gun of his at us, and Alberto’s shouting back...”

A few days later, Alberto filled in what happened next:

“I saw that the *hacienda*-owner was having a go at my Dad and I got mad – I reacted and I remembered how 13 years ago that same man shot my dog dead... I was just a boy, traumatised, when he assaulted my mum and her donkey, and shot a poor innocent dog that later died on the track... and now he’s attacking my Dad again just because a little sheep went on to some of his land, and I arrive full of strong words, going up to Mr Gallegos, and when he sees that I’m not acting humble before him, he says, ‘I’m going to shoot you, and I’m going to teach you to be respectful,’ and he was cocking his shotgun and loading the cartridge, and he came up and he hit me with the butt of the shotgun, here [on the side of my head] where

I've got a wound with four stitches in it, and that's when my Dad stepped in again, when he saw how much blood was coming out...".

In the ensuing exchange, Don Adán swiped the gun out of Sr. Gallegos's hands, and the weapon was whisked away to the *Fiscalía* (office of the public prosecutor) by Tannia and her mother – Sr. Gallegos apparently recognising that things couldn't or shouldn't escalate and that as far as things had gone, there would inevitably be a process of dispute-resolution to navigate. A kind of stalemate began: his truck remained parked nearby in the field, with him sitting in it, waiting for the police to arrive. With the arrival of a good number of *compañeros* (eventually almost every household had at least one member there), their arrival accelerating after the sounding of the school siren, I imagine he knew he'd have to wait in situ before making his case in the presence of law enforcement officials. He got on his mobile and called his mother, who made her way across their fields from the farmhouse.

By now the police had been joined by a regional representative from MICC, dressed in leather jacket and traditional hat complete with peacock-feather. He had been called because this was seen as a matter where the constitutional right to practice 'Indigenous Justice' could be invoked – an internal method of settling disputes separate from the law courts, usually used to address internal conflicts within a particular community, but here extended to include the lands (and owners) of the '*hacienda de San Isidro*', given the fact that the *hacienda* and community were so closely collocated; given the unfinished histories of redistribution and abuse; given the frequency with which such apparently staunch but ultimately unprotected and contested boundaries were challenged (whether wittingly or no); or rather, given the common interest both parties had in finding more stable solutions to these periodic flares of friction.

These were, undeniably, the more emotive reasons and explanations I was given, whilst the critical moment lay in the fact that with the gun presented to the public prosecutor's office, the matter had been brought to the attention of the Chief Prosecutor in Pujilí, and it was on his advice that the MICC legal representative had

been dispatched. In his speech, he made frequent reference to ‘human rights’, and the ‘constitutional rights’ of all indigenous communities throughout the country, to protect their own well-being, collectively, when faced with a threat or infringement of personal or collective action or safety. The community did indeed come together to address this conflict, in the moment, and in situ.

The two police officers and the MICC representative walked over to Sr. Gallegos’ truck and had a conversation – 20 or 30 metres away, they were soundly out of earshot. Here on the small grass-tufted ridge beside the track, which sloped about 2 feet up from road-level then about 4 feet down into the *hacienda* field, a spread of mustered groups now came together to form one constant, concerned arc, looking into the field. The four previously apart conversers had now formed a line stood in the plough-furrows, facing the community-members standing on the bank. The ‘session’ began. The aim was a form of restorative justice.

The MICC intermediary began by describing what it was that indigenous communities could expect, anywhere in the country, in these kinds of circumstances. Though not citing it explicitly, this referred to Article 171 of the 2008 Constitution, where the right to fulfil ‘Indigenous Justice’, so long as it did not contravene any international structure or understanding of ‘human rights’, would be supported by The State who would provide ‘mechanisms of coordination and cooperation’ between Indigenous and ‘ordinary’ jurisdictions). Sr. Gallegos spoke only very briefly, making no direct reference to earlier events, and simply to consent to his participation in this process.

Reaction

The community response structured the session in a way that echoed regular gatherings of the *asamblea comunitaria*, and which was also designed to meet the time-short conditions of the meeting. Two ‘discussion groups’ were formed, since one group containing everyone present would require too much time to allow everyone who wanted to voice an opinion to be heard. Contributions were expected

to cover two topics, the first more briefly than the second: (i) how Sr. Gallegos should recompense those directly affected, and (ii) how he should make amends for any grief and harm caused, but with regard to the community as a whole. Once people had had chance to express their ideas on what *reparación*/reparation should look like, the two groups were to reconvene with a shortlist of suggestions. On the basis of these collectively agreed demands, the community *dirigentes* would then make proposals to the authorities, before seeking institutional authorisation (required to hold Sr Gallegos to account).

The task to be decided in communal debate was clear, and the MICC intermediary reminded us: “I have been called here, along with the police, to resolve an infringement of these people’s human rights – people who are now exercising their collective constitutional rights in seeking sanctions against this neighbouring landowner”. Again the constitutional reference was direct but implicit. Under Heading II, Chapter 4 (“Rights of Communities, Peoples and Nationalities”), Article 57, points 2 & 3, we read of the rights of these groups “not to be subjected to racism nor any form of discrimination” and rights to “the recognition, reparation and compensation to collectives affected by racism, xenophobia or other related forms of intolerance and discrimination”⁵⁶. There was a sense of urgency to maintain these recent constitutional clarifications, and the discussions continued to decide on the community’s demands.

⁵⁶ In the minutes of meetings of the *asamblea comunitaria* I had seen from 2009, gaining protection and rights under “Article 57” had been stated clearly as a potential benefit of registering legally as a *comunidad* with CODENPE. Had San Isidro not been registered in this way with CODENPE at the time of this particular incident, the legal process would have had to have been operated through OPIJJ, adding another layer of complexity and potential delays, etc.



Figure 17 – *Compañeros* gather at the side of San Isidro’s access track to decide on *reparación/reparation* following Sr Gallegos’ assault on Alberto Rojas.

This process of authoring – of devising and agreeing on – demands that would be made in the name of the community involved the sharing of stories and experiences. Various community-members recounted being on the receiving end of other acts of violence in the past, at the hands of Sr Gallegos, or regularly being threatened by him (Sra Pastora told of being verbally threatened a number of times). Usually, these incidents were linked to accusations of trespass, and when these charges and comments were aired again later in discussions with the police and others, the *hacienda*-owner did not dispute them. During the group discussion among the *compañeros*, however, these – sadly familiar – tales were increasingly discouraged in favour of “looking forward” in order to find resolutions at this current point in time.

On the first issue – how Sr. Gallegos should recompense those directly affected – it was suggested that he pay all health costs involved in Alberto’s treatment, and that he face whatever penalty might come in that regard from further legal proceedings in Pujilí. On the second – demands for compensation made by the community as a whole – there were a number of opinions on how these could be combined with

ongoing plans to widen the access track. Since this would involve disruption to the *hacienda* fields (on one side, other privately-owned fields on the other), there was the suggestion of requesting that the new roadside be fenced all the way along the *hacienda* lands. Since the recurrence of ‘trespassing’ problems had been identified as a cause of much of the friction in the past, this proposed solution readily gained support.

Earlier in the *reunión* discussions, the thorny issue of what counted as trespass (and how far the landowner’s right to prevent it extended) was raised partly in Sr. Gallegos’ self-defence. He was sick of people coming onto his lands because he had been the victim of repeat thefts of some of his animals (the *hacienda* runs a dairy herd of about 50 head of cattle, milked at 5am and 5pm by two young women from San Isidro). Former community president Don Leandro, to everyone’s agreement, said that the culprits were people coming from neighbouring Cochaloma, and that this was irrefutable, since “we would be crazy to think we could steal from our neighbours [like that].” Despite the grave nature of events that had brought about this impromptu assembly-meeting, a degree of humour remained, along with a sense of balance in the group discussions. Sra Nicolasa expressed even a measure of empathy: “it’s no wonder he’s pissed off (*cabreado*)... animals straying into his fields all the time – I’d be pissed off too!”

Porfirio, who had taken on the role of facilitator/chair (as much as anything else, a move that was the result of many people’s deference to his experience and determination, an implied request for his input in these matters) was quick to restate, publicly, his view on what would make for the most satisfying resolution. He told the officers, the MICC official and the *hacendado* that what was most important was figuring out “how to maintain a healthy relationship with the proprietor here, our neighbour – to establish a friendship, of respect, and stability... [there should be] no individual agreements or payments for use of road or pasture land, only dealings with the whole community... and, looking to the future, were the *hacienda*-owner to be in a position to sell any of his land, the community – whose land it was – should be given first refusal, given a chance to buy this land.” The MICC mediator also

underlined his interest in seeking a more stable resolution than perhaps had been ‘achieved’ before now: “so long as we can all live in peace, like good neighbours”.

By this time it was dark, cold and the earlier drizzle, now thicker, had done its best to dampen spirits and sap ardour, though with no such visible effect. Nonetheless, a close to proceedings had to be found. The first point was that Alberto and his father Don Adán would accompany the community’s recently-elected president Milton to the Public Prosecutor’s office in the morning to make sure the use of the confiscated gun had been registered, and to set a date for a further, more decisive hearing, in the company of the Public Prosecutor, the Police Superintendent, a National Legal Commissioner and lawyers for both parties (though the community would most likely be unable to pay for legal representation; in the past Don Wilson, a recently-qualified lawyer in his thirties and a friend of Myriam, had stepped in when a lawyer was needed). In due course, a date was set (almost a month later), and the hearing held in the Grand Municipal Hall in Pujilí. This meant that the outcome of the *asamblea* discussions would, at this stage, be guiding principles for this later hearing, the outcomes of which would be legally binding⁵⁷.

Adjudication and Influence

Although this gathering of the *asamblea comunitaria* was somewhat extraordinary in its inception and location, there were familiar patterns to its negotiation. There were

⁵⁷ Police Superintendent, Orlando Quindigalle, later recapitulated the hearing in regional print media (La Gaceta 2011): “In this dispute between the community of San Isidro and the hacendado we have managed to find voluntary agreements; from there all parties have come to be agreed and we, as the authorities and Keepers of The Peace, have negotiated with lawyers for those affected and soon there will be submitted a voluntary desist-declaration to the Public Prosecutor.” There had been five ‘agreements’ in total: (i) pay [health costs] for the damage inflicted on victims (specifically: Alberto), (ii) widen the community access track (taking a strip of land from the hacienda fields to do so), (iii) fence the hacienda fields with wire, (iv) coordinate with the *directiva* to ensure upkeep of these measures, (v) if ever in a position to sell any part or all of his property, the *hacendado* is to communicate this to the *directiva* at the earliest opportunity (La Hora 2012). In the same article (a few months after the end of my fieldwork), Milton made a plea for the deal to be enforced, since Sr. Gallegos had been acting in defiance of the fifth ‘agreement,’ having already embarked on the procedure to sell five hectares of hacienda land to a private buyer. His plea was direct: “in the past, all of the area of land that today is San Isidro belonged to our ‘indigenous ancestors’ (*antepasados indígenas*), the *antepasados* of our *comuneros* living here today, and our wish now is to see the land return to our control, and to engage in this process through legal and ‘transparent’ means, that is to say, by buying it for a financial sum” (La Hora 2012).

still moments of humour along with periodic calls for comments and opinions to remain relevant and constructive. As in so many settings where people are expected to listen to anyone who wants to contribute to proceedings, if someone seemed to be speaking too much, or repeating themselves, or straying off topic, it was common to see people reacting accordingly, perhaps by rolling their eyes or sharing a knowing, silent shrug with someone sitting within their line of sight. Sniggers of laughter might accompany someone using coarse language or deliberately cracking jokes at the expense of others.

At the same time, some people were considered to be influential (*influyente*, or *tener influencia sobre la gente*). This might come from experience or specific knowledge, for example Don Jorge's past work on other community engineering projects gives his technical contributions to pipeline maintenance a distinct air of authority. Similarly, influence might come from previous work in other capacities within the Indigenous Movement (Myriam, Milton, Porfirio – among others – have all worked as part of OPIJJ) or from work with outside agencies (perhaps involving travel outside of Ecuador, as was the case for Rocío Simaluisa, travelling to Peru with her work with *Fundación Jardín de Eden*). Equally, there were people who were former members of the *directiva* (Sra Pastora, Don Leandro, Don Graibi) or who demonstrated knowledge of local history and conditions (Sra Nicolasa).

The *asamblea* also addressed matters of conflict resolution. Graeber describes 'negative authority' as "a matter of preventing or restraining others from acting, rather than inspiring or initiating action... [where] the proper role of public figures [was] not to initiate projects of action, but to maintain the solidarity of a group by intervening to stop individuals from engaging in action likely to disrupt it" (Graeber 2007: 62). Given what we have seen thus far, the authority of the *asamblea* operated around both of the different poles of authority that Graeber identifies, seeking to both initiate action in some settings, and to limit it or control it in others. Crucially, gatherings of the *asamblea* also provided an opportunity to 'maintain the solidarity of the group' by providing space for the discussion, and resolution, of actions that were disruptive to that solidarity.

At one of the regular, monthly *reuniones* held in the afternoon, things began just as they always did. People arrived, handed in their *Cedula* ID cards to the secretary, and found a seat on the benches around the edge of the *casa comunal* meeting hall. As usual, the ID cards were not only used to keep attendance, they were also held till the end of the meeting, to prevent folk from leaving early (this session lasted eight hours, till after midnight). As the meeting was finally drawing to a close, a very public complaint was made by one man about the recent drunken behaviour of another woman's son (neither of the youngsters involved were present) – he was getting sick of the accused hurling drunken abuse at his family and himself, “it happens all the time now”.

The response came that it was nothing more than youthful misdemeanours (*no es nada... son travesuras de los jóvenes, no más*), which a few people supported through quiet laughter. Others joined the discussion however, with increasingly moralistic input: that there should be shame/embarrassment (*vergüenza*) attached to such behaviour, that it was the responsibility (*responsabilidad*) of parents to make sure their offspring learned and adopted ‘the right behaviour’ (*la conducta adecuada*) – that somehow a moral code, expectations of the norm, were here unacceptably being disrupted. Though the proposed resolutions were nothing unusual, and would only be enforced if the same complaints were raised again publicly at some point in the future, this short exchange had allowed for a personal dispute to become public.

Everyone was now implicated in this exchange, however minimally or indirectly they might be linked to the protagonists. Vague assurances were made that stern words would be had (*echar una bronca*), and that they would control those concerned a bit more strictly (*severamente*) from now on (though this was said with a shrug, suggesting this might not happen... immediately). The authority of the *asamblea* was effective when it involved both sides of a dispute submitting to it, in a public space created through people's views and opinions. It also had limits. In this particular case, for example, the process of openly airing grievances and listening to others' suggestions toward a resolution, did not lead to any direct regulation of intra-

family relations. Were the issues to continue, they could eventually be subject to another ‘conspicuous’ discussion in the *asamblea*, the outcomes of which would again be uncertain and unenforced.

IV. Conclusion: Testing and Transformation

Despite its limits, the *asamblea comunitaria* relied upon a particular form of organizing and the creation of a public space in which ‘particular individuals are recognised as such by others’ (Rapport 2013: 160). This recognition – an outcome of participation in the *asamblea* – implies and requires ‘an openness to others and an overcoming of isolation’ in which individuals allow themselves to be ‘transformed’ by others in the process of striving ‘to understand their meanings and perspectives – as in Arendt’s ‘space of appearance’ (ibid.). The *asamblea* authority, then, resulted from aspects of people’s private lives being ‘exposed’ and openly discussed, influencing rather than imposing any subsequent change in behaviour. Since the role of the individual is highlighted in the prescribed public ‘space’ of the *asamblea*, and since each individual is then expected to abide by its decisions, personal contributions to the *asamblea* effectively re-assert a willingness to engage in such collective endeavours.

Participation in the *asamblea comunitaria* thus involved being ‘conspicuous’ – people displaying something of their own personal histories, and their own specific concerns and intentions. An individual offering an opinion, speaking out, or even sharing in a laugh that provoked someone to then speak or not speak – all were actions with unpredictable and irreversible consequences. This ‘revelatory’ characteristic of action – revealing the self through interaction, in a context of togetherness: the space of appearance – is the quality through which action reveals more to the world than would be suggested or contained by any specific outcome or achievement by itself (Arendt 1958: 180). For Arendt, it is precisely this ‘disclosure’ of individual ‘agents in the act’ that contributes to the character of *action* (Arendt 1958: 180). As we have seen, these dynamics are reflected in the process of *asamblea* activity: in how people negotiate their will (or reluctance) to play a visible

role in communal life, in the election of people to positions of responsibility on the *directiva*, and in the interpersonal exchanges that constituted the *asamblea*'s decision-making (or, following Lambek, the process of 'decision-doing'). The 'means' of *asamblea* action were all-important: knowing *what* decision the *asamblea* had made would tell you little about *how* that decision had been arrived at, and perhaps less still about *who* had influenced the process, and in what ways.

Individual roles in the practice of the *asamblea* thus varied a great deal, in part because the issues it was tasked with addressing covered a wide range of conflicts and disputes. Whilst it was a form of coordinated action that could work to bring about particular, sought-after outcomes, it simultaneously tested the relationships that were necessary for collective discussion and deliberation (d'Entrèves 1994: 77). Whilst 'making' decisions, the *asamblea* in practice was also 'doing' other things: acknowledging the 'unique agents' (Arendt 1961) taking part and their individual roles in 'supporting and enduring' (Agamben 2000) the decisions of the *asamblea*; and asserting the community's role as an active *comunidad* within the broader Indigenous Movement.

Operating through the *asamblea* made San Isidro 'legible' to allied organisation such as OPIJJ and MICC – facilitating action as part of those networks (detailed further in the next chapter). It also initiated new ways of accessing other outside organisations, including NGOs and state agencies. The influence of MICC and the broader Movement is clearest in this regard in the prescription of the *asamblea* as an organisational structure expected in legal registration as (first) an *Asociación* and (more recently) as a *Comunidad*. The imposition of this organisational ideal, however, has been transformed in practice. The *asamblea* created a public space where relations – addressing common concerns – were initiated and fostered. Those relations occurred amidst 'human plurality' – the interplay of equality and distinction for Arendt – and subsequently strengthened a shared sense of similarity, enabling people to "plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them" (Arendt 1958: 175). Effective, cooperative action as part of the *asamblea comunitaria* had become a goal in itself, and an adopted ideal had been steadily transformed into a social value.

6

Cannons, Campaigns and Buen Vivir: Action Within The Indigenous Movement

You've seen what they do... with the land. Their huge farms.
They think the clouds, the clouds in the sky are theirs too?
- Rocío Simaluisa

In the last chapter, I argued that action undertaken through the *asamblea comunitaria* reinforced shared notions of the importance and possibilities of cooperative activity, as pursued at the community level. Whilst purposive, and working toward particular outcomes, these forms of action were not straightforwardly linear. They achieved certain goals, but in the process they also generated 'consequences' (Lambek 2013) – unforeseen changes and interactions. These changes reflected on the constitution of the community, the diversity of its members, and on the value attached to the continued use of established political forms and structures (in those instances, of the *asamblea comunitaria* itself). Here, I make a similar argument concerning action undertaken within a broader sphere: as part of regional branches of Ecuador's Indigenous Movement.

Drawing on Habermas' critique of Arendt and his emphasis on 'strategic action' within 'the concept of the political' (Habermas 1983: 181, at Ball 1992: 24; Habermas 1977), I explore the significance of a specific, coordinated campaign that was undertaken in 2009 against local *haciendas*/plantations by an alliance of neighbouring communities. It was coordinated by the regional OSG/organization of indigenous communities (OPIJJ), and supported by the provincial wing of the Indigenous Movement (MICC). It also had a definite objective: to put a stop to the use of certain technologies by *los brocoleros* (nearby broccoli plantations, and their owners).

In pursuing its objectives, the campaign involved action within two distinct spheres: organizing protest mobilization, and pursuing a joint legal case. The legal claim made instrumental use of the 2008 Constitution, and constructed a case around rights relating to the concept of *Buen Vivir* (Harmonious Living). The campaign also brought together a diverse range of groups and grievances, and sought to defend a variety of livelihood practices which were (and which continue to be) under threat. I focus in particular on the importance of the campaign in terms of its influence on future actions and on inter-community relations.

Due to the distinctive methods and dynamics of the action taken against *los brocoleros* – centred on the framework of rights associated with *Buen Vivir* – I also examine the strategic techniques deployed, along with their objectives and outcomes. As is the case with many ‘successes’ for rural, marginalised and indigenous movements, the outcomes and achievements tend to be uncertain and unstable (Borras & Franco 2009). In response, some analytical work seeks to explain the apparent failures of such movements (Brass 2007; Lucero 2003), whilst other approaches focus on the interaction between indigenous groups and state powers, in terms of nation-building, political emancipation and citizenship (Yashar 2007, 1998; Pallares 2002; Clark & Becker 2007; de la Torre 2006; Korovkin 2001). Other responses place particular events, mobilizations, campaigns and their outcomes within the broader context – and timeframe – of national and regional movements, within Ecuador itself (Jameson 2011; Becker 2011b, 2013; Zamosc 1994) or within the sub-continental context (Van Cott 2008; Petras & Veltmeyer 2005).

More appropriate for the events considered here are approaches which analyse indigenous or landless mobilizations more specifically in terms of community formation, the fashioning of collective subjects, and shifts in (the meanings of) identity (Wolford 2004; Lazar 2008; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009). Whitten argues for just such a focus: to look beyond the social, political or economic ‘changes’ that are brought about by or attributed to actions – changes which may be ‘miniscule’ or ‘ephemeral’ in comparison with the hegemonies they contest and confront – and instead to examine how the dynamics of collective action transform ‘the politics and

poetics of local identity’ in ways which ‘motivate social movements’ and, as such, lead to future actions (Whitten 2003: 359). This is not to discount the visible impact of coordinated actions, but rather to consider movement practice and movement ideals in relation to these impacts (Maeckelbergh 2009: 68), and to explore why certain techniques and interactions are considered more valuable than others. Whilst the focus is on the impact of this particular campaign in and around San Isidro and on inter-community relations, events surrounding the ‘cannons’ mobilisations also reflect shifts in indigenous political agency in Ecuador – in the era of ‘twenty-first century socialism’ (Burbach 2007) that has been so clamorously championed by President Correa.

I begin by outlining the origins of the campaign, the tensions it emerged within and sought to address, and the initial responses to them that were coordinated by MICC. Throughout, I consider the various consequences of the campaign action: (i) how participation in the campaign influenced forms of interaction between communities in the region, (ii) the impact on the visibility and viability of action undertaken by indigenous organisations such as OPIJJ and MICC, and (iii) how these two dynamics combined to inform subsequent actions. I then detail the legal case put forward by member-communities within OPIJJ, and examine its links to ‘Buen Vivir.’ In the third and final section I relate these localised instances of indigenous action to the national political context. I suggest that, whilst misgivings persist about the cooption of ‘Buen Vivir’ within the sphere of national development, campaigns such as this one reflect successful, ongoing attempts to secure livelihood practices around San Isidro, making strategic use of opportunities to expand networks of cooperation and mobilisation.

I. Building The Campaign: Disputes, Connections and Indigenous Networks

Tungurahua and the Cannons

Don Jorge Llumiquinga and I had been hiking all day along the route of the irrigation-pipeline. We had left the maintenance-hut in the páramo at dawn, then headed upstream to the capture-tanks and small dams at its source, before making our way back along the pipe's path, carved into the hillsides (to check every air-valve and flow-gauge along the way). Midway through our day of hiking, we stopped for lunch, perched on a rock in the UV-intensive páramo sun, scooping handfuls of liberally salted toasted maize into our mouths, and cracking the 'shells' off toasted broad beans from two small plastic bags, striped in the three colours of the national flag. Among other topics, we discussed food and food production, and Don Jorge made the point that if 'food sovereignty' were to be viable anywhere in the world, then Ecuador would be a good candidate: "We're lucky in Ecuador, with our range of crops and climates: everything grows somewhere in this country... we're not going to starve... the politicians might kill us first, but we won't stave to death here in Ecuador!". He also commented on local land scarcity, and how the 'agricultural frontier' had been pushed higher and higher in these hills, the páramo foothills, pointing to the few potato fields perilously etched into the steep slopes, further down the valley.

We had made good progress and were on the home straight: the return trail that takes us past the last, highest signs of agriculture up above the spot known as Rumipungo (we pass a few of the high-vertical strips of potato plants, and the occasional cow for milking, tethered to its small patch of grazing). Before long we would be passing the oxen-ploughed fields of Yacubamba, Rayoloma and Tuglín, on past the hill-top chapel at La Playa, and then making the steep descent down into San Isidro.

He walked with a staff and, as I struggled to keep up, he told me about the whole process of getting the pipeline built, about his children, his two dogs, local land

disputes, old conflicts between friends, his take on the international dispute over *las Islas Malvinas*, and about some of the political struggles he had been an active part of in the past. In between our moments of conversation, at one point I thought, maybe, I had heard the very distant sound of an aeroplane, or something, passing overhead – a speck, perhaps, lost miles above us in the piercing blue firmament. Even in the mid-afternoon, the sun was aching down on us, a searing sun like yesterday, like most yesterdays it seemed.



Figure 18 – Don Jorge Llumiquinga (with the route of the pipeline marking the hillside to the right in the background).

This regular heat of the bright sun, the regular hours of daylight year-round – each and all could remind you of, or emphasise, curious feelings of place. Of being on the equator – and, as such, of being somehow closer to the middle of the world (*la mitad del mundo*) – and even lending some sense of congruity to the idea I'd been introduced to by a local lawyer, that, given its geographical qualities, Ecuador was truly or justifiably the centre (lit. navel) of the universe (*el ombligo del universo*). In San Isidro itself, Volcano Cotopaxi stands perpetually in view, a majestic presence of snow, ice, height and wonder – along with a measured threat of fire and eruption

(though reasonably distant, about 25 miles away, it is still considered ‘active’, and wiped out the provincial capital of Latacunga twice in the eighteenth century). A visible point of release on the surface of the world, for the magma welling beneath, the animated centre of this powerful, erupting earth.

Again I heard the unusual sound – a profound low rumble – that caught my ear a moment earlier. I was sure I felt it through my feet, this time. I was about to mention it, wondering if my tiredness from the hike was giving way to delirious exhaustion. Then there it was again. Don Jorge stopped, silent. We both heard it a third time. A slight nod, and a pause, then he set off walking again. “Mama Tungurahua,” he said.

I had forgotten the news. I had been in the páramo working for a week with cousin Hendry and his girlfriend Jenny, as they took their turn for a maintenance shift there. For that time our only contact with the wider world, the only communication with anyone other than ourselves (before Don Jorge’s arrival on the last day) had been nightly phone-calls to a member of the *directiva* back down in the valley. As such, I had forgotten about the reports and televised updates on Volcano Tungurahua’s recent activity – Ecuador’s most active volcano. Things had escalated to ‘orange alert’ the previous week. By the time we were home again, looking south you could clearly see its conical shape outlined on the horizon, and above it a vast column-cloud of ash and gas, its breath. Though some 40 miles away, through the roar and murmur we had, that day, felt its sonic presence, and seen this lively character of the hills in action – ‘*Mother Tungurahua.*’

I was struck by the experience. I enjoyed it. Don Jorge grinned whilst I remarked on how, before that moment, I had never heard the earth’s thunder, nor felt the bellow of a volcano. He read my wonder as alarm: “Not us, we’re not scared by it. She lets us know she’s there. Part of the Earth, and so: *Mama Tungurahua.*” The next day I was told I should hike back up into the hills and find, and bathe in, the hot-springs above Yacubamba, since they were ‘always hotter after an earthquake.’ Tungurahua’s influence had other effects too. Don Jorge continued, “the closer you get, the more you see it in the soil – rich, dark, almost black soil. They say the ash is really good

for cleansing the soil. Those who live right there, though, they'll be evacuated. We'll be ok – though last time [a year earlier, in May 2010], at night, you could see the lava – could just see it on a clear night – from here, from San Isidro. Many times in the past. Before that, though, we also thought we had heard Mama Tungurahua – we heard, we listened, but there was nothing you could see. We heard explosions. We had no idea. And what was it? It was those cannons!”

Those inexplicable sounds, made by ‘those cannons,’ turned out to be emanating from some new installations constructed on the nearby *Hacienda Selva Alegre*, a broccoli plantation run by the company *Empresa Nintanga*. This was at the start of 2009. Those living nearby in the closest communities (Cinco de Junio and San Gerardo) found the noise deafening. In San Isidro, a mile or two up the road, the unusual, regular detonations would startle horses and livestock, and for a while no one came up with an explanation. Tungurahua? The sounds were too regular, and there had been nothing about regional volcanic activity on the news. Gunshot? Too loud to be just a regular gun. Some kind of construction work? There were no new structures of any size anywhere, and no diggers or machinery to be seen (as had previously been used to build drainage channels). Soon, the truth was out and the sound-source identified: they had installed *cañones antigranizo*.

‘Anti-Hail Cannons’ are devices that have a relatively small footprint (a solid metal tripod about 6’ in span) and working mechanism (what looks something like a jet engine around 5’ in length, positioned vertically), and can be housed in a small brick-walled shed. Out of the top of the base, and through the corrugated roof of the shed, stands a tall metal cone, almost 10’ tall and fluting from less than 1’ in diameter up to maybe 2.5’. These cannons ignite a charge of acetylene gas in the blast-chamber base, and this explosion releases a pressure wave which is designed to disrupt the formation of hailstones in the atmosphere by creating a ‘cavitation’ effect.

Hailstones could damage the leaves and harvest of *Selva Alegre’s* main crops (broccoli, romanesco broccoli and cauliflower). Anti-Hail Cannons offered the plantation owners the promise of reducing this damage. The cannons – unlicensed

and constructed without any prior consent, nor permission from provincial environmental agencies – also disturbed life in neighbouring communities. Not only due to the ‘unbearable’ noise but also, and more importantly ran the legal claim, since the cannons disrupted or diverted rainfall patterns in the surrounding area.

MICC, the Media and Inversion

Talk of these events spread quickly. Affected communities began organizing. Responses were coordinated, and benefited greatly from the support of MICC (and the contact information and legal advice that they shared from their offices in Latacunga). Before long, marches were held, with hundreds attending the largest (Fig.19). People from communities throughout the valley came and joined. Through campaigning work carried out by MICC, different groups were connected and the story grew. In total, more than 30 communities were affected across the province.

Empresa Nintanga also had plantation fields in the rural parish of Guaytacama, in Latacunga canton, not far from the Latacunga-Quito stretch of the Panamericana highway. The communities of Chantilín Bajo and Laigua de Maldonado in Aláquez parish were also affected (La Hora 2009). Through MICC, these groups were put in touch with communities in the Alpamalag valley – among them, San Isidro – and the numbers of people involved in subsequent marches and coordinated actions grew as a result.

This alliance then contacted the Cotopaxi Provincial Ministry for the Environment and pushed them to investigate the use of anti-hail cannons and the negative environmental impacts (noise pollution and apparently disrupted rainfall patterns). As detailed in the legal document itself (v. Section II, below), this report was conducted by a former director of the Cotopaxi National Park, Eddie Coello (then a representative of UCAC: *Unidad de Calidad Ambiental Cotopaxi* / Cotopaxi Environmental Standards Unit). As a result, the provincial Environment Ministry secretary, Carlos Villón, ruled that the company had not complied with

Environmental Control Laws, and they were given 15 days to obtain the appropriate licence.

These developments were covered in the national press (Comercio 2009), the regional media (La Hora 2009; Ecuador Inmediato 2009), and also received treatment in provincial tele-journalist reports. The example mentioned of the national press coverage introduces the story through the related experiences of two farmers. It begins with the dry leaves of maize plants planted by a woman in a community in Latacunga canton, where there has uncharacteristically been no rain for weeks. We learn her name (Blanca Culqui) and age (65), and are given a sense of the diminutive scale of her *chakra* (smallholding, 350m²). In the portrayal offered, the article then draws our attention to features of our protagonist's physical features: Sra Blanca is described as 'a woman with copper-coloured skin and calloused hands ([una mujer] *de piel cobriza y manos callosas*)' (Comercio 2009).

There are echoes here of the grimly familiar and persistent set of language practices used in national mainstream media to portray indigenous people in pejorative ways (Whitten et al 2003: 206; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1998). In this instance, however, such discrimination was being applied not just to indigenous people, but to all rural people. Those involved in the campaign were people from communities coordinated through MICC, and thus self-described as either indigenous or campesino. Whilst all the communities coordinated through OPIJJ and close to San Isidro were registered and identified as indigenous, the vast majority of people living in Aláquez parish were registered as *mestizo*⁵⁸.

The 'pyramidal class structure' that persists in Ecuador dominates through associations of 'white' and 'urban' which are set at the 'top,' against the 'rural' and 'poor, pluralized black, *mestizo*, and indigenous people on the bottom,' a structure that when assumed to be 'an unchanging, static reality' by those at the top, is supported by manifold powers of bureaucracy and the media (Whitten & Whitten

⁵⁸ In 2001, Aláquez parish had a population of 4895, 94.9% of who are registered as *mestiza* and 5.01% as indigenous (Aláquez n.d.).

2011: 110). Sustained discrimination against rural people has entrenched these divisions between ‘rurality and urbanity, stasis and dynamism, the agricultural and the industrial’ (Latta 2011: 85). It has been met by equally varied and sustained responses. A determination to reduce such division and prejudice was central to the call made by CONAIE in 1988 for Ecuador to be recognised as a plurinational state (more on this in Chapter 7). Similarly, it has led to the expansion of MICC and other third-tier organizations.

Originally, MICC did not explicitly represent the views of non-indigenous (or *campesino*) groups and communities. The organization’s base *Casa Campesina* was built in Pujilí in 1980, and in Salcedo before that in 1974 (CONAIE 1988). The movement initially took the formal name ‘MIC: Movimiento Indígena de Cotopaxi’ in 1981, but this was changed to reflect the inclusion of *campesino* communities in August 2001 (Bolaños 2006: 77) – whilst cross-community cooperation had in fact been happening throughout the organisation’s history. The broadening of MICC membership in this regard involves a symbolic inversion (Whitten 2003: 359) of structural asymmetries, turning the discrimination against rural people into the grounds for more extensive cooperation among diverse rural groups. The ‘expansion’ of MICC is also reflected in the campaign itself: the broad, and untested (Fatheuer 2011) scope of ‘Buen Vivir’ could be used to reflect and represent diverse rural concerns, cutting across established boundaries of locale and identity.

The overall campaign, supported by MICC, operated in these ways at the provincial level, drawing together different areas of activity. I focus here, however, on the work and campaigning that was based in the Alpamalag valley. This was channelled through OPIJJ, and more directly involved the participation of San Isidro residents (either as signatories to the case document or, like Don Jorge, as participants in organised marches).

Alpamalag: OPIJJ and the Communities

As MICC activities grew in scale, and as the news of developments in the case (and of planned responses) circulated among villages in the Alpamalag valley, protesters joined from neighbouring parishes, other affected areas such as Guaytacama, and also from different parts of the province (communities not directly affected by the use of anti-hail cannons). Within the year, the process had come to a close. The outcome satisfactory for members of the communities concerned, since *Empresa Nintangá* were forced to stop using the cannons. In response to the high-profile marches and protests, the company had first fitted ‘silencers’ to the cannons to dampen the sound slightly, in the hope that this would disrupt their neighbours less, and would thus bring the campaign to a close. The weather disruption continued, however. It was only after the legal case had been pursued, backed up by the Environmental Reports and eventually ratified by a judge, that *Nintangá* were banned from using the cannons at all (six of them in total were subsequently dismantled and sold). It was a hard-won battle, though, and one that was often retold.



Figure 19 – Protestors gather outside a hut built to house an anti-hail cannon, at *Hacienda Selva Alegre*, 2009. (source: OPIJJ 2009: 63). See Appendix 2.ii for an overview of the plantation lands.

My friend Rodrigo Tucumbi from Rayoloma (during most of my fieldwork, he was vice-president of MICC) would still describe the '*antigranizo*' campaigning as a successful, illustrative example of the Indigenous Movement in action: a range of people showing solidarity across differences of location, interests and geography throughout the region. In this particular case, the focus was on those within the OPIJJ group, and the coming together of 'hill communities' (those located at higher-altitudes, typically further from any towns, and described as *arriba*/above, where Rodrigo lived) and 'valley communities' (those located closer to main roads and towns, such as those close to the broccoli and flower plantations, and described simply as *abajo*/below). The positive outcomes, he'd say – just look at it, impossible to do alone – spoke for themselves. The idea was that the *antigranizo* campaign illustrated the viability of actions coordinated across different parishes and between indigenous and campesino groups and, at the same time, strengthened the processes of interaction and cooperation between different indigenous communities within OPIJJ.

Not only did the campaign achieve its goals, he continued, it had also left a legacy of more effective ties across member-communities of OPIJJ. During the period of my fieldwork, some 18 months after the *antigranizo* campaign, OPIJJ members were pursuing another case against the *brocoleros*, this time focusing on pollution and water-use. In this regard, Rodrigo was most interested in the recent visit I had been a part of 'inside the *brocolero hacienda*'.⁵⁹ A former president of OPIJJ, he was more comfortable talking about these rekindled acts of solidarity between 'hill communities' and 'valley communities' than the issues behind my other questions – the rumoured tensions between the current OPIJJ leadership (below).

Rodrigo noted that at the two recent campaign meetings, held in the OPIJJ base of the *Casa Campesina* meeting-hall in Pujilí, it wasn't surprising that not many people

⁵⁹ Just a couple of weeks before this particular conversation, I had accompanied three representatives from OPIJJ on a formal visit to the largest broccoli-producing *hacienda* in the Alpamalag valley with the principle purpose of confirming where they source their water and what specific agro-chemicals they were using.

attended – and that among those who did there were few people from the ‘hill communities’ (such as Yacubamba and its satellites): “it’s the ‘valley communities’ that are directly affected anyway – San Gerardo, Cinco de Junio, and their neighbours – and even then not everyone in those communities knows about the (OPIJJ-initiated) case – and some don’t even want to know... just as here, let’s face the truth, in the ‘hill communities,’ here around Yacubamba, not everyone goes to meetings in their own *comunidad* – and it is a long way to travel to Pujilí for people here... it’s just harder to make things happen – it was easier with the anti-granizo cannons campaign, then we had people coming from Saquisilí and further away, in solidarity, joining the fight... I do think this [current] case is important, even though I don’t live beside the *brocoleros*...” It’s important to note that these inter-community relations were an ongoing concern, and not just tested during particular campaigns and events. Relations between San Isidro (considered a ‘valley’ community) and Yacubamba (in the hills) had to be carefully negotiated and maintained for the sake of a most basic need: access to water.

Water and Cooperation

In San Isidro, inter-community relations were usually raised in discussions about water provisions. Previous agreements with the nearby communities of La Playa and Yacubamba to share water resources and infrastructure have suffered from tempestuous relations, broken contracts and disagreements. This instability stemmed in part from shifting allegiances between changing *directiva* members, which resulted in interrupted plans and applications. On occasions, these shifts could also result in disrupted or unreliable access to water itself.

Iván Guamán’s mother, Sra Rosa, was familiar with this level of unpredictability. We were discussing the ways in which the water-pipeline in San Isidro had transformed things. This came about since the previous week I had given a single-use camera to Iván (and to a handful of other residents) and asked them to take pictures of things they thought I should see or find out about, and which I might not encounter otherwise. Some of the kinds of work that they have to do, favourite

places, people I might not have met. Right away, Iván offered: “ah, right – I see – pictures of the house here, perhaps – of what I think is important.” He had some questions: “how many shots are there on the film? How long have I got to do this in?” I suggested I’d come back the following week, and added: “Yes, perhaps a picture of your house, but also your family maybe – your work and what your friends and family do working... but anything really, anything you yourself would like to have a photo of! They’re for you as much as they’re for me.” On this day, I was returning the developed images and they described their contents to me.



Figure 20 – Iván Guamán’s brother Edison and his mother, Sra Rosa, cutting alfalfa (photo: Iván Guamán).

The sites chosen prompted a whole variety of comments, stories, reflections. There was Iván turning the soil at their grandparent’s house, there with his brother Edison who was visiting from Quito, where he studied at university. There was a new house being built by some neighbours that Iván and a friend occasionally got paid work to help on. There were shots of Sra Rosa and a neighbour cutting large areas of green, irrigated grasslands to feed alfalfa to their guinea-pigs. This dense green herbage

leapt out of the soft pastel shades rendered by the cheap camera film. She told me, “we used to get water by the minute [before the system we have now] – it wasn’t just the hacienda taking most of the days each week, but by the time what we were getting was divided up between all of us in the community, we’d have only minutes each at a time – that was for irrigation – the place was dry, very dry... the *agua potable* (drinking water) project, the pipes come right by us here... We have two lots of *agua potable* – two sources... one comes from up there – from Cuturibi – the other, is shared with Yacubamba... they’ve cut it off in the past. Disputes. They can be so... who knows what they’ll do? At the moment, things seem like there’s no problem – but we’ll see.”

Don Jorge, who we met earlier, would describe a reliance on only the predictable unpredictability of any involvement with outside groups, including many neighbouring communities. Through his engagement with indigenous politics from the national to local scale, he saw instability as a constant, with no assurance of anything from outside sources. Such sources might include (i) the state (often ‘absent’ or unstable, especially in the 1980s and 1990s), (ii) NGOs: once a source of support, *World Vision* had recently decided to pull out of Ecuador, or (iii) cooperation with neighbouring communities, not least with reference to the shifting relations with Yacubamba.

Despite this impression, the president of Yacubamba at the time, Don Toribio Toapanta, had fostered a period of increased reliability. Among other acts, he attended the *brocoleros* OPIJJ case-meetings in the *Casa Campesina* in Pujilí, and this despite two potential stumbling blocks. These came in the form of criticisms often levelled at residents of Yacubamba. On the one hand, whilst the case pushed for stricter control of the dumping of agro-chemicals (pesticides and fertilizers) on the part of the *brocoleros*, the *brocoleros* themselves complained that use of similar products among hill-community farmers affected the water supplies downstream, jeopardising the ‘organic’ accreditation of some of their broccoli-production. Other communities, too, had another criticism: living downstream of the hill communities often saw brooks and canals turn into ‘oceans of plastic’ during high rains and

floods, linking this to irresponsible disposal of domestic waste upstream. Along with this came a concern for the potentially negative effects of waste issues in hill communities on the quality of drinking water supplies in valley communities.

Yacubamba itself, given its location higher up in the hills (only Yanahurco is located further up into the hills), was not directly affected by either the anti-hail cannons or the reported use of agrochemicals by the *brocoleros*. We might ask why Don Toribio was such a visible and vocal contributor to the case. He certainly had experience of similar disputes, and had been directly approached for advice by members of the OPIJJ *directiva*. But did he also stand to gain politically from this allegiance? Would involvement in cross-community campaigns usually sow the seeds of potential political gains? At the time there were two reasons that suggested this wasn't the case.

The first was the apparent gamble involved in participating in any kind of coalition or collaboration. Even the OPIJJ model of coordinated action among neighbouring communities of different sizes from the same extensive, varied corner of a parish, would sometimes highlight this problem. Milton Guamán, as mentioned above, had considered resigning from his post as vice-president of OPIJJ after a locally televised interview with the president of OPIJJ had presented an inaccurate image of what work had been carried out in San Isidro, who had been responsible, and who was to thank. Some older members of the *directiva* in San Isidro suggested he should resign – that the risk of losing the trust of his community-members was too great to entertain: his association with OPIJJ could colour people's judgement of his commitment or focus on matters specifically related to San Isidro and the well-being of its inhabitants.

The second reason meant that Don Toribio was in a similar bind. Since Yacubamba was so safely removed from the *brocoleros*, some people questioned what his contribution to proceedings could possibly be, and some thought this represented him neglecting his own community's interests. At the same time, from the other perspective, despite the 'gamble' associated with certain alliances (being held guilty-

by-association of an ally's actions), someone in his position had to avoid being suspiciously seen as seeking to gain more than is fair from OPIJJ or MICC for their own community. Thus, community leaders would have to negotiate this 'balancing act' between acting in their community's interests, maintaining a degree of independence, benefiting from OPIJJ-style collaborations when necessary, and being seen to be someone who contributes to the organization's efforts for honourable reasons (not only in circumstances where the case in question directly affected their own communities).

II. Buen Vivir: Rights, Diversity and the Legal Claim

Haciendas, Empresas and Contrastructural Powers

Negotiation of this 'balancing act' became a contributing factor to involvement in the campaign – but only for certain individuals (those who were members of the *directiva* of participating communities). The majority of people taking part in the marches were mobilised by a moral impulse – and indignation was widespread enough to gather together people living in hill communities, valley communities, and in the unaffected, neighbouring canton of Saquisilí. In the context of persistent relations of inequality, the use of anti-hail cannons was another example of the invasive presence of the *haciendas* (Lyons 2006, 2005). In Chapter 4 we saw how the 'death of the *hacienda*' following Land Reform in the 1960s was only ever incomplete – usually the presence of the landowning elite began to exert influence in less direct ways, and disputes over access to resources were felt just as acutely as ever, if not more so (Weismantel 1988: 74; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 37). Recalling the campaign, community-member Rocío Simaluisa talked about the ongoing conflict with the *hacienda* at San Isidro, and linked its dominance to plantations elsewhere in the valley – where the use of these cannons was seen as an extension of their moves for expansion. She asked rhetorically, "You've seen what they do... with the land. Their huge farms. They think the clouds, the clouds in the sky are theirs too?"

Esmeralda Yasig had first introduced me to the Alpamalag valley, San Isidro, and its residents. She was an active resident of the Cinco de Junio community, and founder-member and activist-worker with the *Centro de Formación y Capacitación “Herederos de la Pachamama”* (“Mother Nature’s Heirs” Training and Education Centre) located there. She had converted the roadside room of her house into a small shop, selling sweets, cigarettes, bottled drinks and some household items, cleaning products, crisps. In front of the ‘shop’ there was a small, dusty patch of ground where a passing pick-up truck might park whilst stopped to make a purchase. This looked out onto the fields that Esmeralda and her parents worked, and where the *Centro* had been built.

The land was not irrigated and relied on rainfall. The soil was a pale greyish-brown in colour, and in consistency resembled the soft sand of sand-dunes. Where crops were planted and able to grow, there was slightly more consistency – nonetheless as soon as Esmeralda or any of the youngsters who attend weekly sessions at the *Centro* applied the blade of an *azadon*/hoe to dig out weeds between the wilted-looking rows of maize, the air was greyed and their feet lost in a cloud of rising dust. Cross the single-lane Pujilí-Cusubamba road from Esmeralda’s shop and you came up against a tall black plastic-mesh fence, beyond which rows of sprinklers stood spouting out over verdant rows of broccoli.

It was Esmeralda who researched and compiled the data on access to water in the Alpamalag valley in Appendix 1, below. Historic agreements had secured abundant water supplies for all the neighbouring *haciendas* – and some were supplementing these by digging new aquifer wells. The persistence of imbalances between local landowners and communities was something that Esmeralda looked out on every time she left her house, or looked out the door of her shop after a customer. “Land Reform then, and today: the new Constitution, in 2008 – these changes are supremely important. But who listens to them? You’ve heard about the *brocoleros* blasting the sky with high-pressure gas, blasting away the rain. We had to fight. Now, these days... it’s not allowed for *haciendas* to exist, but they’re still here –

look [points out across the broccoli plantations] – *haciendas* are still here, they just changed the name, now they're *empresas* (businesses/companies)." The anti-hail cannons were themselves an invasive presence – disrupting the weather, disturbing livestock. In battling against them and raising the legal case, those affected were continuing a struggle that had been fought for many years, taking different forms over time.

The campaign was, then, a continuation of *la lucha* via confrontations with many different agents and issues. What these instances of collective action share in common is activity that seeks to "enhance critical insight and to sustain movements into and out of liminality and into new dimensions of social relationships" (Whitten 2003: 29). Building on Turner's (1974: 273) definition of "anti-structure" as the "positive, generative center" of social relations, Whitten argues this is what "becomes apparent when collective action takes place and when people evoke the dynamic dimensions of symbols that may, in quotidian life, lie dormant or passive in their institutional manifestations" (Whitten 2003: 29). That is, such moments of collaboration give rise to "contrastructural powers" which "refer to sociosymbolic forces that coalesce against dominant or structural power, such as the nation-state, military, police, or corporations" (Whitten 2003: 359, 397).

This idea of 'contrapowers' reflects on two key connections at play within the campaign. The first is the relationship between motivations and needs. The campaign mobilized 'sociosymbolic forces' in the sense that it enabled participants to continue to engage with the *struggle*, which both challenged inequalities and, in so doing, generated new social relations and forms of interaction. This was not intended to be a momentary inversion of symbols or institutional orders, however. Rather, for many of those taking part, the campaign was about securing access to a vital natural resource: water.

At the same time, even though the campaign drew on and fortified various networks of collective action, its methods were not entirely 'contrastructural.' More specifically, one sphere of action relied on established protest techniques – protest

marches and mass mobilizations (Graeber 2009; Jameson 2011; Scott 1985; Duncombe 2007) – whilst another relied on strategic use of structural, legal powers, spheres that are usually experienced negatively as discriminatory (and/or corrupt) by marginalised groups throughout Ecuador (Lane 2003; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2003; Rogers 1998). This latter sphere of action, the legal component of the campaign, relied heavily on particular elements of recently recodified structural power – rights attached to ‘Sumak Kawsay’ / ‘Buen Vivir’ in the national constitution.

Sumak Kawsay

I only ever heard the Kichwa phrase ‘*Sumak Kawsay*’ a handful of times in San Isidro, and its usual Spanish translation ‘Buen Vivir’ hardly more often than that. Whenever either was used, the conversation was in a meeting or relatively formal setting, usually a discussion among members of the *directiva* regarding upcoming events, workshops or campaigns organised by MICC, to which member-communities of OPIJJ had been invited. It was a term that had arrived from elsewhere. In an interview, Porfirio described some of the current hurdles faced by community struggles, and what some of their repercussions were. These were difficulties which ‘prevent us from living a good life or, as has been talked about so much recently, the *Sumak Kawsay*’ (*que no nos permite llegar a esa vida buena, o lo que últimamente se habla mucho del Sumak Kawsay*). More usually, the ‘good life’ was described as a ‘decent/worthy’ life, or a ‘harmonious,’ or ‘dignified’ life (*una vida digna/armónica; una vida con dignidad*).

These all relate closely to the original associations of *Sumak Kawsay*: “Sumak means the ideal, the beautiful, the good, the realization, while Kawsay represents the life, in reference to a decent life, in harmony and balance with the universe and human beings. In sum, Sumak Kawsay means to live the fullness of life” (Ariruma Kowii, cited by Torres-Tovar 2013). The phrase has, however, taken on new significances since the adoption of ‘Buen Vivir’ in the 2008 Constitution.

The Ecuadorian Constitution now brings together a ‘Buen Vivir regime’ with a ‘development regime,’ where Buen Vivir is a complex set of several rights, including those related to ‘health, shelter, education, food, environment and so on’ (Gudynas 2011: 442). This leads to “a development program or strategy that must be articulated and functional within the framework and objectives of Buen Vivir... [this] requires that economic, political, social, cultural and environmental areas should be arranged to guarantee the Sumak Kawsay” (Gudynas 2011: 443; Acosta 2008). This marks a radical step in altering the foundations and techniques of ‘development’ in Ecuador: “Development is [thus] the realization of Buen Vivir, and the construction and realization of Buen Vivir is what enables this new vision of human and social development” (Walsh 2010: 20). The Constitution also grants the world’s ecosystems (borrowing from the Kichwa idea of *Pachamama*, or Mother Nature) ‘inalienable rights to an unhindered existence’ (Becker 2011b: 152; Walsh 2010).

The aspirations are high. Buen Vivir is an attempt to grant that ‘all positions that promote ethical perspectives are grounded in values,’ and to then ‘work against the conventional domination of utilitarian values and against reductionism of life to economic values’ whilst acknowledging a ‘plurality of value-systems – the cultural, aesthetic, historical, spiritual, environmental’ where concepts such as ‘degrowth’ become ‘not an objective, but a consequence’ (Gudynas 2011: 446). These ideas reveal the ‘hybridization’ of the term, and its origins which lie both in the adaptation of ‘cosmologies where the concept of ‘development’ is non-existent,’ and in critiques of (and alternative visions for) development emerging in the West (Walsh 2010: 19). At root, there is a critique of ‘modernity’ itself, seen as “a particular ontology that in the last centuries determined the division between nature and society, a colonial distinction between modern and non-modern indigenous peoples, the myth of progress as a unidirectional linear path” (Gudynas 2011: 447; Acosta 2008).

As a result, people have asked whether the concept of Buen Vivir is now destined to ‘degenerate into a propaganda slogan of the state,’ or to ‘become a new dogma of salvation (Fatheuer 2011: 28). Indeed, it appears that Buen Vivir can now be invoked

in all kinds of situations, some decidedly distant from cosmological roots in a oneness with Nature. Nathalie Cely, Ambassador of Ecuador to the United States, brought the term into international relations: “In accordance with Ecuador's ideology of ‘Buen Vivir,’ through which the Ecuadorian government guarantees to protect and promote the rights of our citizens at home and abroad, the embassy I lead and our consulates across the U.S. are responsible for giving a voice to Ecuadorian citizens that for legal or systematic reasons are ostracized by the host country” (Cely 2013). It would seem that Buen Vivir is already becoming another “discursive tool and co-opted term, functional to the State and its structures and with little significance for real intercultural, interepistemic, and plurinational transformation” (Walsh 2010: 20).

Such concerns have led to widespread responses, actions and protests – aiming to highlight government policy and action which contradicts (or blatantly disregards) the tenets of Buen Vivir, as detailed in the Constitution – especially around national Water Laws and Mining Laws that have been proposed and introduced since 2008. These actions have been widely documented and analysed (Acosta 2010, 2012; Zibechi 2009; CONAIE 2009; Burbach 2010; Becker 2013). There is less work, however, detailing the ways in which the rights attached to Buen Vivir in the Constitution have been used⁶⁰ – the focus of the next section.

The Case in Detail

There were seven key signatories to the case that was submitted to Pujilí's regional judge in June 2009, representing seven different groups (from six different communities), and acting on behalf of all fifteen member-communities of OPIJJ (the first signatory was Pablo Guashca, then president of OPIJJ). Next to Esmeralda Yasig, Porfirio signed as founder-member of the *Centro de Formación Indígena ‘Guamán Poma de Ayala’* (The Guamán Poma de Ayala Indigenous Education-Creation Centre in San Isidro), along with Gerardo Guamán as then president of the *Asociación* of San Isidro, before it had been formally registered as a *Comunidad*. The

⁶⁰ One notable exception was the high-profile international case raised by Alberto Acosta and Vandana Shiva against BP (Jarrín 2010) which appealed to the rights of *Pachamama*.

other community-specific signatories were the president of San Gerardo de Alpamalag and the director for *agua potable* from San Francisco de Quishuar. Finally, these six were joined by the president of the *Agua Potable Council* for the area.

The case pursued a detailed claim based in constitutional rights. It secured legal endorsement from three legal representatives, all members of the Quito-based Regional Foundation for Human Rights Legal Advice (INREDH, *La Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos*). In addition to the endorsement of these three lawyers, the case presented a key piece of evidence in the form of a Technical Report issued by Eddie Coello of UCAC (as above). The complaint then pursued seven lines of argument, detailing seven ways in which the activities of *Nintanga* contravened principles contained in the Constitution or violated the Rights of Citizens enshrined in that same document.

The first appealed both to the contents of Section/Heading VII of the constitution – under the heading ‘The Right to Buen Vivir’ – and also to Article 20 of the Environmental Management Law from 1999 (which states that activity posing environmental risk must be fully licenced and authorized by the appropriate government Ministry – Congreso Nacional 1999). This section focused on the noise pollution caused by the anti-hail cannons, the disruption, due to distress, of normal vital cycles of production of livestock and laying poultry, and framed these issues as things that went against the spirit of *Buen Vivir* (which covers many Articles, among them #389 addressing [Environmental] Risk Management in relation to the overarching theme of *Sumak Kawsay*).

In the case document, background to the concept of *Buen Vivir* came from a cited document written by the President of the 2008 Constitutional Assembly, Alberto Acosta, which emphasised the idea of ‘harmonious life’ shared among human beings and between them and Nature or, elsewhere in the Constitution, with *Pachamama*. This was the only section of the case document to refer to the Cotopaxi National Park and, in so doing, to suggest that the noise pollution caused (mainly in Latacunga

canton situated closest to the Park, rather than here in the Alpamagalag valley) would also impact negatively on the National Park's status by scaring-off resident wildlife.

The second section of the case document addressed the concept of Food Sovereignty and Article 15 of the Constitution, which declares the responsibilities of the State to include the promotion of 'green' (environmentally clean) technologies, building on Article 14 that states the right of the population to live in an 'ecologically balanced environment.' Here, the focus was again on the use of this specific type of imported, unlicensed technology and the fact that any disruption to rainfall patterns threatened the viability of agricultural practices that supported or promoted Food Sovereignty.

The third argument referred to the 'violation of the right to prior consultation'. On this, Article 398 of the Constitution affirms that "Every state-sanctioned decision or authorization that might affect the [natural] environment must be subject to community consultation." In addition, Art.398 refers to that what constitutes 'prior' consultation and community participation, whilst the time-scales and 'value criteria' involved are covered by State law. There had been no process of licensing or authorization, however, and hence no community consultation of any kind prior to the installation of the cannons.

This was then considered in reference to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – the only section of the document to invoke articles that dealt explicitly with legal matters pertaining to the lives of recognised indigenous people. The case related was of a rural community in the canton of Quito who opposed the development of a multiplex cinema – on various grounds – and the projected negative impacts for the community were judged by the Constitutional Court to be sufficiently severe (and no prior consultation had taken place) that the development plans were deemed illegal and stopped.

The fourth dealt with some of the more ambitious and radical components of the 2008 Constitution – articles which lay out the Rights of Nature and the ongoing existence, maintenance and regeneration of all Natural Cycles. Article 71 explicitly

identifies Nature with ‘Pachamama’ as the source and site of life and its reproduction. Article 73 expands on the rights mentioned above, detailing the responsibilities of the state: to apply ‘measures of precaution and restriction to any actions that could lead to the extinction of species, the destruction of ecosystems or the permanent alteration of natural cycles.’

Whilst recognising the extent of this thinking – that it is to introduce a new paradigm of a *biocentric* vision of the world – the argument linked its roots to how sustainable development is conceived of and described in the Constitution, with its emphasis on social justice, Buen Vivir, respect to nature and ‘intergenerational equality.’ This section pre-empted the following one, illustrating how any disruption to rainfall patterns caused by the anti-hail cannons not only affected systems of (crop) production in the affected areas, but also negatively impacted on wild plants, trees, rivers and the climate in general.

Building on the last, the fifth section referred to the violation of the Right to Water, as specified in Article 12: that this is a fundamental, inalienable human right, and also that water ‘constitutes strategic national patrimony for public use’ and is ‘inalienable, non-lapsable, not subject to seizure, and essential for life.’ Elsewhere in the Constitution (Articles 411-412, under the heading ‘Biodiversity and natural resources’ in the ‘Buen Vivir’ chapter), the role and responsibility of the State is detailed further: ‘the conservation, recuperation and comprehensive management of water resources, regulating all activity that could affect the quality or quantity of water sources.’

Drawing together most of the key points already made, the sixth section drew on Article 14 of the Constitution which (as above in reference to the production and promotion of Food Sovereignty) recognises ‘the right of the population to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment’ – in order to ensure sustainability and Buen Vivir. Here, reference was also made to the report that had been sent to the National Environment Ministry, which had determined various factors that contravened the right to a healthy environment: the noise levels generated by the

anti-hail cannons were in excess of permissible limits; use of the cannons had led to climatic change and a reduction in rainfall; the ongoing use of agrochemicals by *Nintanga* threatened the natural environment.

Finally, the case document cited Article 396 of the Constitution (again under the heading of *Buen Vivir*) which details the precautionary principle to be applied to policies and measures that impact directly or indirectly on the living environment: ‘in case of doubt about the environmental impact of any action or omission, even if there exists no scientific evidence for the damage, the State will adopt efficient and appropriate protective measures.’ This element was particularly important given the contested causal links between the use of anti-hail cannons and a lack of rainfall.

The stated operation of anti-hail cannons was designed to stop the formation of hail stones, without necessarily dispersing clouds in the process – though their effectiveness on either front is disputed. *Nintanga* clearly had enough faith in their efficacy to proceed with their investment. When approached by the press at the time, a representative from *Nintanga* pointed to exactly the uncertainty that surrounded their operation: “what the people from these communities [round here] are saying is not certain. The lack of rainfall is due to global warming [not the cannons]” (Comercio 2009).

The role of uncertainty here is important. The Constitution returns to the idea of the precautionary principle more than once. Article 426 sets out the instruction that ‘judges, authorized personnel and public servants will directly apply constitutional rules’ and follow international norms of human rights, even if related reports and complaints do not explicitly refer to them. Article 427 clarifies that ‘in the case of any doubt,’ constitutional procedure must follow the course that most closely complies with an understanding of the constitution as a whole – that is, in support of *Buen Vivir* as a guiding principle for development policy. The theme is also found in Article 395, number 4: ‘In the case of any doubt about the reach of legal regulation in environmental matters, regulation will be applied in the manner most favourable to the protection of Nature.’

Given the weighting of this case document toward the contents of the Constitution, it is perhaps hard to imagine how the case might have proceeded prior to 2008, without any mention of Buen Vivir. However, in closing, the document stipulated another demand less closely related to the foregoing statements and articles. In addition to calling for the immediate suspension of all practices involving anti-hail cannons and the alleged dumping of fluids contaminated with agrochemicals into neighbouring streams and irrigation ditches, there was a demand to prohibit *Nintanga* from engaging in any practices that might best be understood as ‘sensitizing’ (Fassin 2003; Gellner & Hirsch 2001). That is, to prevent company representatives from ‘entering affected communities with the purpose of building relationships or using other procedures designed to work on convincing people to accept the aforementioned illegal activity against nature and against other human beings.’

This last entry is further evidence of the OPIJJ-centric nature of the document. Not only were the seven signatories all based in the Alpamalag valley, but this stipulation echoed what Esmeralda Yasig had told me before about unofficial meetings designed to bring a swift end to any protests. She had been visited by the plantation owner (said to be a close relative of President Correa) and was asked, “What is it that you are protesting for? What is it that you want, Esmeralda?” To this, I’m told she replied: “I want the people farming here [in our valley] to have enough water, and for the businesses to use no more than the bare minimum.” Esmeralda had been singled out as a visible and vocal campaigner. She was not, at the time, an elected leader within OPIJJ. Her response inverts the strategy of ‘sensitizing’ activities that personalises shared concerns: by answering a personal question with a more general response, she re-states the campaign as rooted in the needs of plural communities, and concerned with the defence of (the possibility of maintaining) livelihoods. Doing this – tackling the actions of companies in the Alpamalag valley – was ineffective on the level of any one individual or community. For this reason, the campaign was undertaken collectively, by OPIJJ – by a ‘union’ of communities built into the regional network of indigenous organising.

III. Possibility and Change

Horizons of Possibility

In previous chapters, we have seen how localised expressions of what people hold to be vital or desirable are linked to how those same people assess the importance and significance of their own actions (Zigon 2009). That is, different actions have revealed, and depended on, the “degree to which human beings perceive themselves as possessing the capacity to act on the physical and social world to apprehend [as in to realise, to make real] what is valuable” (Demian 2003: 316). In this light, ‘resistance’ can be seen as ‘acting on the world [which is] acting on us’ – as acting against forces and events which prevent or inhibit attempts to realise what is valuable (in the case examined here, to act against the use of technologies which disrupted the ongoing practice of family-scale agriculture in San Isidro and in nearby communities).

Analysing intentional action which is geared toward social change is to place such action within the ‘shifting world frameworks’ that shape and govern it (Whitten & Whitten 2011: 195). Around coordinated community action in San Isidro, two ‘shifting frames’ are particularly clear in their influence, one of which is positioned ‘concentrically’ within the other. More immediate are relations with other member-communities of OPIJJ and the regional Indigenous Movement. Beyond that is the national political context within which the Movement is operating. Within the former sphere, events occurring in villages surrounding San Isidro exert an influence on what is thought to be feasible and desirable in terms of organized activity. That is, the outcomes of actions undertaken by neighbouring communities, in and around the Alpamalag valley, go some way toward shaping what are thought to be the possibilities of collective action and community organizing within San Isidro itself.

When successful, such campaigning reveals anew the possibilities for San Isidro, as a community, to address conflictual relations with their own immediately neighbouring

hacienda. The role played by local and regional political structures and events is not only influential in these ways, however – it is also instrumental. Among other things, OPIIJ can facilitate legal advice, as well as fostering ties of support and assistance with MICC. As in Chapter 5, the presence of (and active role played by) these supportive networks were crucial – links with MICC provided pivotal, and timely, legal intervention in the conflict between the community and the *hacienda* at San Isidro.

Similarly, the *brocoleros* campaign did more than affect the ‘horizons of possibility’ (Guyer 2009) of collective action in San Isidro in this way. The specific issue (putting a stop to the use of anti-hail cannons) at the heart of the campaign became another expression of a more general conflict – one fuelled by long-running claims against the work, methods and existence of the large-scale plantations which occupy lands of former *haciendas*. A comparable, collaborative dynamic is seen in the defence of indigenous rights and rural livelihoods elsewhere in the world, where the purpose of political action is not “to preserve some isolated identity over and against others, but to ensure that the space stops closing down around [those concerned] – literally and politically in terms of the alienation of their lands” (Kenrick 2011a: 196).

In order to look at these efforts in more detail, I bring together two streams of thought which analyse ‘historicity’ as a way to understand both what people consider salient about their (recent) pasts, and how possibilities for the future have been contested and negotiated. This reflects two key elements of the campaign. On one hand, a focus on historicity illustrates how the campaign fits into an ongoing struggle that is inextricably linked to the landscape, and to relations of inequality that are manifest in its division/s (Whitten & Whitten 2011). On the other, it reveals how visions for the kinds of values that wider society might pursue in the future are challenged and evaluated – values which, in the case of Buen Vivir, were presented as principles for guiding ‘development,’ in line with other recent changes to the Constitution (Gledhill 2000; Walsh 2010; Gudynas 2011; Acosta 2010).

Historicity and Constitutional Change

Since an earlier interest in the approach of social movements literature within studies based in the Andes (eg. Starn 1992b, 1994), anthropological work with a particular focus on Ecuador has tracked shifts in indigenous politics – specifically those from class-based to identity-based struggle, shifts that have developed post-Land Reform and intensified in the 1990s (Pallares 2002)⁶¹. Using analyses made at the national level, more acutely focused work has then detailed how cultural practice is – often deliberately – inseparable from direct engagement in local and national political processes (v. Wibbelsman 2009; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2003; Whitten & Whitten 2011). These different activities and, I suggest, the Buen Vivir campaign, coalesce within struggles around ‘historicity.’

Escobar critiques Touraine’s (1988) problematic distinction between the work of social movements in post-industrial societies, and that undertaken in so-called Third World settings. He does, however, build on Touraine’s understanding of these various struggles as being more than straightforward campaigns for economic gains, certain services, or forms of organization (Escobar 1992: 404). Whilst specific demands may be sought, also at stake for many such struggles is the control of historicity, here understood as the set of cultural modes and frameworks that shape social practices, and which are enacted through epistemological, economic and ethical ideas and practices (Escobar 1992: 404). Such a multifaceted site of contestation means that ‘control’ is unlikely to be comprehensive or permanent. Instead, dominant ‘modes and practices’ are challenged by different actors at different times. This reflects coordinated challenges to the ‘discursive field’ that shapes the historical positioning of marginalised populations (Mignolo 2005), imposes on people inequitable conditions and definitions of wealth and poverty (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999) or, indeed, labels them as ‘problem populations’ (Chiriboga 2009). Informed by these positions, Gledhill’s (2000: 188) reading

⁶¹ Becker (2008) points out that emphasising this time-scale to such a shift in the Indigenous Movement, as a class-based movement to one which is primarily and self-consciously rooted in identity politics and responsive to global movements, is to overlook the fact that, since the 1920s, indigenous mobilisation had already previously utilized the language of nationalities, and was both influenced by, and contributed to, action across regional, national and international levels.

defines historicity more succinctly, in terms of ‘cultural orders’ which themselves define ‘not only where society has been but where it might go in the future.’

In recent years, particular attention has been paid to the influence of indigenous action in shaping Ecuador’s contemporary political landscape – and where ‘politics might go in the future’ – in reference to the national Constitution (Becker 2008, 2011b, 2013; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Acosta 2008; Acosta & Martínez 2009). Since the second wave of land reform in the 1970s, Ecuador’s Indigenous Movement has continued to open up spaces of contestation and politicisation, leading through the uprisings of the 1990s to today’s much more prominent political position, and a role at the forefront of social protest movements (Pallares 2002: 29; Becker 2013: 16). In the process, national and regional currents in the Movement have ‘reinvented and rejuvenated structures of indigenous community formation,’ and built on the recognition achieved in a 1998 Constitution of collective rights and particular mechanisms of political and territorial autonomy (Latta 2011: 119-120; Sieder 2002; Hill 1996). That recognition reflected the influence of indigenous agents and agencies, which had for the first time achieved translation into significant Constitutional rights.

Over time, however, it became all too clear that what had been one of the most ‘generous’ constitutions in Latin America from the perspective of indigenous peoples’ rights (Bretón 2008) had been met by a failure to implement the promised constitutional advances within policy (Becker 2011b: 59). As a result, the 1998 Constitution “had practically no effect on the everyday life of indigenous groups” (Bretón 2008: 585). Ten years later, a similar process of Movement influence on a Constituent Assembly was repeated, though this time with different outcomes.

In 2008, under president Correa, another new Constitution was ratified – the country’s twentieth since independence in 1830 (Becker 2011b: 134). Various described by analysts at the time and since as progressive (Becker 2013), remarkable (Ghosh 2012), and pioneering (Acosta 2012), it codified “much of what popular movements and others on the political left had long demanded” (Becker 2013: 12).

Understandably, those who had been making these demands were wary, both of the professed similarities between the new government's stated aims and their own efforts, and of how the contents of the new Constitution might once again be buried and ignored.

The contested terrain between state politics and grassroots mobilizations was thus bound up in processes of cooption – regarding both indigenous groups and ecological campaign organizations, who had been instrumental in the constituent assembly (Acosta 2008; 2012). Holding the government to account in upholding and protecting constitutional rights was to become a central focus of movement activity: “Although indigenous movements, as well as most social movements, shared Correa's stated desire to curtail neoliberal policies and implement social and economic policies that would benefit the majority of the country's people, they increasingly clashed over how to realize those objectives. The political outcome of the new constitution depended... on whether organized civil society could force the government to implement the ideals that the assembly had drafted” (Becker 2011a: 49).

The cannons campaign sought to address entrenched relations of inequality⁶², but it also had the effect of testing some of these objectives – even in the context of a legal system that was widely considered to be notoriously unfavourable toward indigenous and rural communities (and/or corrupt). The new constitutional rights associated with Buen Vivir emerged as tools that crossed boundaries (or previous understandings of) identity, and networks and relations were strengthened across those boundaries. This legal framework allowed different communities to project onto the *lucha*/struggle their own, diverse grievances, bringing together groups of people ‘resisting particular processes, and maintaining certain other processes,’ in opposition to extractive industries, and in support of life as it can be lived in specific places (Kenrick 2009b: 15). The campaign, then, was part of a series of ‘multivalent’ (Escobar 1992) mobilisations, centred around a call for an end to the unequal distribution of access

⁶² Recent data show that structures of land holding and formal access to water continue to be dominated by inequalities and disagreements: in Cotopaxi there are 200 haciendas, and these properties cover 47.49% of agrarian land, and use 37.55% of the are under irrigation (Flores 2009: 21). See Appendix 2 for more on the division of land within Cotopaxi province, post Land Reform.

to water in the Alpamalag valley. Rather than pursuing resistance mobilized around specific identities (Spivak 1988), the campaign instead worked to defend ways-of-living – more ‘strategic livelihoodism’ than ‘strategic essentialism.’ Thus a specific material and legal objective (to prevent the further use of anti-hail cannons) enabled broader physical and political ‘spaces’ (Kenrick 2011a: 196) and forms of organising to be kept open and maintained.

The campaign was also deeply connected to people’s daily interactions with the environment, and the need for water. As the Whittens note, reviewing broad dynamics of transformative action among marginalised peoples in Ecuador, there is an innate physicality to seemingly temporal ideas of where society has been and of its possible futures: “historicity – what people take to be salient in their pasts – is intricately and inextricably bound to the *landscape*... Landscape as a holistic sense of environment, constitutes not only a set of sites for a livelihood but also a sacred, cosmic phenomenon, embodying everything by which people identify as us and other” (Whitten & Whitten 2011: 10). In our example, as with the ongoing disputes described previously (Chapter 5), people’s connection to the conflict and willingness to participate in its resolution were closely linked to contesting whether conditions that “have been” the case were to be considered part of the past, or part of the present (and to what extent future action will also need to collectively address these issues).

The ongoing dominance of large-scale local landowners marked the landscape of the Alpamalag valley as clearly today as ever – witness Rocío’s exasperation at the *brocoleros* trying to ‘own’ the clouds, and also Esmeralda’s comment, above: “the *haciendas* are still here, they just changed the name, now they’re *empresas* (businesses/companies).” Challenging inequitable distribution of natural resources, and at the same time testing and reconfiguring broad notions of ‘where society might go’ with Buen Vivir, the cannons campaign also challenges our understanding of historicity, the make-up of rural activism in highland Ecuador, and what constitutes different kinds of ‘strategic’ action.

IV. Conclusion: Interpreting Campaign Action

The cannons campaign represented a direct intervention in national politics (utilising constitutional rights around Buen Vivir, holding the government to account). At the same time, it reflected a continuation of ongoing efforts to secure localised access to land and natural resources. A province-wide, legally-framed campaign is a very particular act of resistance: formal (as opposed to informal), collective (rather than individual), and public (not anonymous). Identifying these characteristics, however, is not to assess their relative merits or strategic success. Instead, it is to identify different forms of repression that structure the options available to those involved at different times (Scott 1986: 28; Korovkin 2000). In this Buen Vivir campaign we encounter differences between *making* laws and *using* laws. There is an ambivalence surrounding the question of to what extent the legislature controls the latter. A more sympathetic political climate – or at least a context which is nominally so, according to the letter of an ambitious Constitution – enabled and facilitated this kind of campaign action by introducing a legal framework that previously did not exist. Understood this way, however, and we’re close to the repeating the “trope” that “the active superior realm (e.g. the legislature) creates opportunities for those in the inferior realm (e.g. the locality) to succeed in developing within the frameworks the superior has created” (Kenrick 2011a: 196). Rather, we have seen how some of the contents of the constitution were put into practice through coordinated action undertaken by an alliance of rural communities.

The ‘framework’ of Buen Vivir – in 2009 – was still relatively untested, itself an ambivalent term: did it represent a political move that would help protect the marginalized, or was it destined to be ‘mismanaged’ through contradictory policies (Walsh 2010)? Within this ambivalence, the ‘locality’ was able to adopt the Buen Vivir framework and use it to its own ends, specifically to expand connections and networks of mobilisation (Narotzky 1997: 90). This resulted in a form of ‘peasant resistance’ that was not “a conservative, reactionary, and ultimately futile attempt to preserve traditional societies from a quickly disappearing past” but was instead work

that “[recognized] the unjust nature of the ownership of the means of production and [was] proactive in altering social and economic relations” (Becker 2007: 160).

The legal case aligned livelihood practices in different areas and communities to the expansive, ambiguous definitions and understandings of Buen Vivir written into the 2008 Constitution. These definitions outlined ideas about what kinds of practice – agricultural, commercial, social – might be required in order to work toward or defend ‘Buen Vivir.’ The specific concerns of each different community did not have to exactly match these definitions, nor coincide completely, in order for the case to continue. In turn, this parallels the dynamics of collective action within San Isidro itself, where sets of issues (access to land, use of the landscape, access to water, the ability to practice family-scale agriculture) are addressed without first having to establish or achieve unity. Differences in understandings of identity and disputes are neither denied nor necessarily overcome within the different forms of coordinated action. Common concerns overlap sufficiently for a campaign to continue, amidst a diverging range of personal motivations prompting participation.

In addition, the ‘consequences’ of the campaign were more numerous and diffuse than its specific objectives and outcomes. It gave rise to new connections between groups and communities in the region, and made the work of both OPIJJ and MICC more visible. These changes, in turn, reflected on the purpose and potential of collective action, this time at the scale of collaboration among regional and provincial organisations. The campaign achieved its main aim and, as such, cast these organisations in a renewed light: as both a source of support, and as a network of relations deemed ‘indispensable’ to the ‘efficacy’ of such shared undertakings (Demian 2003: 317). Nonetheless, the instability of these ‘successes’ meant that they required further action in order to be defended, maintained or built upon.

A further, key consequence of the campaign was its influence in prompting subsequent actions, whilst also enabling them. Previously isolated communities had been brought together for a common purpose and, by aligning diverse grievances, were then better able to mount a successful legal case. Subsequently, another legal

claim has been made against the *brocoleros* (contesting their use of agrochemicals), relying on the participation of communities which were both directly negatively affected by the *hacienda* farming techniques, along with communities which were not – cooperation that had been used to particularly good effect in the cannons campaign. Much of the more ambitious and radical content of the 2008 Constitution had been made possible by the influence of the Indigenous Movement over many years of action (Acosta 2012). This Buen Vivir campaign shows how subsequent constitutional change was then put to use within branches of the Movement to address long-running, localised inequalities. In the next chapter I bring the focus back to action within San Isidro, and explore how local notions of ‘development’ have been pursued, this time in spite of (rather than utilising) national-level policies.

Patrimony and Inherited Struggle: Celebratory Acts, *Bienes* and Distinct Development

In recent years, the identification and celebration of *patrimonio*/patrimony have become increasingly central to community action in San Isidro. In particular, actions carried out as part of ‘community development’ – also known as *propio desarrollo*, or ‘distinct development’ – have relied upon this kind of activity, establishing (through meetings, group discussions and commemorations) what is considered to be the *patrimonio* of San Isidro. This involves identifying and celebrating (or preserving, as appropriate) features of life in this locale, be they socio-historical in nature (past and ongoing conflicts, the lives and actions of recent ancestors) or geographical (particular aspects of local landscapes, flora, fauna).

This chapter examines these processes, and focuses on a thanksgiving ceremony organised to mark the first anniversary of the irrigation pipeline’s completion. Such celebratory events both commemorate past efforts, and reaffirm the importance of current activities for those taking part. These actions of reflection and affirmation are central to the cultivation and perpetuation of a particular sense of place – of the kinds of tasks (Ingold 1993), narratives (Basso 1984) and struggles (Blaser 2004) that are encouraged, enabled or endured in a given location. In some analytical work, a reinvigorated interest in the particular is seen to illustrate the ‘potent tendencies towards localization’ (Meyer & Geschiere 1999) that accompany globalization (Appadurai 1990). In this vein, renewed attention to the locally-specific is characterised as a ‘reactionary,’ ‘defensive’ or ‘introverted’ obsession with ‘heritage’ (cf. Massey 1994: 5)⁶³. By contrast, I argue here that coordinated moves to celebrate

⁶³ This position is rooted in a long history of social theory, as I note throughout this chapter. Chatterjee summarises this orthodoxy: “In the received history of Western political theory, capital and community have been antithetical... there is a strong feeling that not all communities are worthy of approval in modern political life. In particular, attachments that seem to emphasise the inherited, the primordial, the parochial or the traditional are regarded by most theorists as smacking of conservative and intolerant practices and hence as inimical to the values of modern citizenship” (Chatterjee 1998: 278).

patrimony and place in San Isidro (i) form the basis of ‘continued’ collective participation in ‘indigenous struggle’ (*seguir luchando*), and (ii) reflect distinct ideas about *desarrollo*/development in, and for, the community.

In Ecuador and elsewhere, ‘universalising’ policies at the national level have relied heavily on an association of place with the past, of the particular with the traditional, and have thus devalued localised practices (Latta 2011; Lyons 2006; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Kenrick 2011b). On this basis, ‘modernization,’ ‘*mestizaje*’ and ‘development’ have, at different times, sought to transform the lives and livelihoods of certain people according to prescribed visions for the future (Beck & Mijeski 2000; Bretón 2008; Van Cott 2008; Wade 2009; Andolina et al 2009). Central to these visions has been the distinction between tradition and modernity (Blaser 2004), and adherence to a particular vision of progress: one that considers the world it encounters beyond its own limitations – as ‘other’ – as “archaic, irrational or conservative” (Latour 1993: 73).

As Colloredo-Mansfeld (1999: 27-8) points out, ‘modernity’ is predicated on the erosion of commonalities, and “the upsetting of traditional material, moral, and social unities is [regarded as] the essence of progress and the advancement of modern ideals (Habermas 1987b; Berman 1981).” This artificial or ideological separation of global-modern and place-tradition is central to the maintenance of systems of domination and marginalisation (Blaser 2004: 27), and to the three sets of ‘modernising’ policies in Ecuador detailed below. I begin by examining what kinds of features are identified as *patrimonio*, which are celebrated, why, and by whom. I then consider the impact of these three national policies on highland communities such as San Isidro, and analyse how contemporary practices of ‘distinct development’ seek to compensate for some of their marginalising and deleterious effects.

I. Identification: *Patrimonio* and Projects

Plants, Skills, Fibres

Don Rocendo showed me around the plot that extends out behind their house. A couple of pigs, tethered, scratched and chewed noisily, and a handful of chickens pecked among the wide variety of plants that were growing all around us. As we made our way up the slight incline to the two pot-tiled-roof sheds – each home to at least a couple of dozen *cuy* – he reminded me that the land belonged to his wife, Sra Luz, “it’s not my land, it’s all hers.” He had moved here from near Cruz Pampa, just north of San Isidro, and had sold off his land there to a neighbour years ago. He also pointed out the various medicinal plants, herbs and spices growing there, picking some as we went along.

There was *santamaría*⁶⁴, similar to *manzanilla*/chamomile but with slightly bigger flower-heads – said to make a brew that’s a good treatment for headaches, and that had a soothing, calming affect on people’s temperament (the same said for *valeriana*⁶⁵). As I asked about these plants and herbs, others were mentioned that I didn’t get chance to see or sample: *zumpillo*, another herbal plant found in the páramo (said to grow there especially since it was good to drink its tea in cold weather); *pintzi*, found closer to home, its leaves could be crushed and used on cuts and bruises; *wayta blanca*, a bush with white flowers, also found in the low hills above San Isidro itself, and sometimes its leaves used in teas.

Back in Sra Luz and Don Rocendo’s house, we ate freshly-picked *guayaba*/guava. One of at least two different varieties growing in their plot, mine had a dappled

⁶⁴ *Santa maría*/tanacetum parthenium/wild chamomile/feverfew. Throughout this section, and in the chapter as a whole, I have documented the names of plants and animals as they were commonly referred to in italics, along with alternate spellings (and English translations). I have also included the formal names of plants to reflect the process of identifying *patrimonio* as it took place in San Isidro – which included the systematic documentation of local flora and fauna.

⁶⁵ *Valeriana microphylla*/valerian.

yellow-green skin and orange-coloured flesh. All the ripe *granadilla*⁶⁶ had already been eaten – six grandchildren were running about the place, and helping themselves to the picked fruit. I asked Sra Luz if her children and grandchildren visited every evening, or (for those not living immediately next door) visited often. “No,” she replied, “not always. They [her daughter Mónica with her son and daughter] are only here to ask if we’ll look after their children tomorrow... we live here alone – just the two of us... normally that’s just how it is.” Mónica works as a teacher in the *colegio* in Yacubamba, a combined journey on foot and by truck of an hour and a half, each way. As such, when her husband Ubaldo Rojas is working in *el Oriente* as a contracted oil driller, the children’s San Isidro grandparents were recruited to look after them outside of school hours.

Whilst we chatted, Sra Luz put some of the leaves Don Rocendo had picked earlier into a pot of water left near the fire and brought back to the boil. We drank the common *cafecito* (*agua aromática*) which had been made with *cedrón*⁶⁷. As I left he handed me a bunch of the *cedrón* stalks and leaves, “para la casa.” Later that week, back at ‘the house,’ these were mixed with some eucalyptus leaves to make an infusion to help treat José, who was suffering with *gripe*/flu. It was one of many remedies to make use of some of these readily-available aromatic plants.

Workshops and UNESCO

Given their ubiquity and widespread use, it perhaps should come as no surprise that all the herbs and flowers mentioned here by name were identified by various people during a meeting on the topic of patrimony. Those present were assigned to small groups who were then asked to list things that would be considered ‘*patrimonio*’ in San Isidro, under headings provided by the facilitator (Myriam, in this instance). The first such *taller*/workshop put forward for a community meeting had taken place in May 2010 (before my fieldwork began), and then had only lasted a short time. Input

⁶⁶ *Passiflora ligularis*/passion fruit, with yellow skin, white casing, and off-green flesh. Elsewhere, in markets, these would be sold alongside *maracuyá*/*passiflora edulis*, a passion fruit with purple skin and off-yellow flesh.

⁶⁷ *Aloysia citrodora*/lemon verbena.

on the topic of *patrimonio* had lain quite dormant since then, not receiving fresh attention till September 2011. During an annual review meeting (the elections in Chapter 5) at which representatives from all community-member families were expected to be present, four groups were formed to address four different questions: reviewing annual reports from the *directiva*; discussing changes to the community rules and conditions; proposing plans for the coming year; and selecting different natural or built aspects and qualities of community life to be identified as *patrimonio*/patrimony.

Myriam led the group and gradually offered a range of ideas as to how this term could be locally defined and applied – beginning with buildings such as the chapel and the *casa comunal*, then focusing on the páramo, and on the *patrimonio natural* (natural patrimony) which included the plants, herbs, fruits and flowers all mentioned above, along with significant sites (especially certain caves, lakes and rivers in the páramo). Clarifying one of the intended outcomes of the session focused attention on plants that were rare or under threat: “with these lists... we could put up a sign on the roadside announcing San Isidro’s protected-patrimony status... and this would mean a promise from all of us, a promise from all our *compañeros*, not to destroy these certain identified plants, say... to work together to preserve our *herencia*/heritage...”

Other elements of *patrimonio* were equally present in everyday settings and practices, as if in the background. Indeed, at the very kinds of meetings where these workshops took place, there would be visible examples of *patrimonio de la sabiduría cotidiana* (patrimony of everyday wisdom, or ‘practice patrimony’). During community meetings, which would often last all evening till the latenight hours, there would usually be at least a handful of women working away, throughout the discussions they were a part of, making *higras* (*igras/shigras*) of different colours and sizes.

These *bolsas tejidas con cabuya* (bags woven with thread/fibre from *cabuya*/*penko* plants) took shape through thousands of tiny knots, patterned with shapes or the

occasional image of a bird or animal. These skills were among various *habilidades*/crafts and abilities that made use of the *fibra*/fibre of the *penko*/agave plant⁶⁸. The threads that made up the *higras* could be coloured with *tinturas*/dyes purchased in the weekly market in Pujilí (where the weavers also sell their bags) or, sometimes, dyed at home with the juice of fruit (eg. *mora*/blackberry) or with charcoal and water. Those who weren't sitting stitching might be engaged in an earlier part of the process requiring specific *destrezas*/skills, carding and combing the threads which were coarse and knotted after the dyeing process.

Declaring plants and practices as things to be protected – as *patrimonio* – like this reflected a recent interpretation of the term, which has a difficult history. In the 1960s, '*patrimonio*' took on particular significance, in two different ways. As in Chapter 2, the concept was used by the state in processes of Land Reform and Resettlement during the 1964 IERAC measures – when vast areas of lowland regions were declared *terra nullius*, a blank white tract on a map – its contents the “patrimony of the state” (Sawyer 1997: 68), and then granted to resettled communities from the highlands. Meanwhile in San Isidro itself, the larger areas of redistributed land – larger than the individual *huasipungo* plots that were allocated to individual had-workers and their families – were composed of areas of the páramo. This amounted to 1060 hectares of land, and was declared to be *Patrimonio Familiar de la Comunidad de San Isidro*⁶⁹.

In these more recent workshops, however, usage of '*patrimonio*' drew explicitly on definitions outlined by UNESCO. Porfirio, with Myriam and Rocío, had begun a book project designed specifically to document the *patrimonio* of San Isidro: “there already exists a book on the history and communities in this small region – we

⁶⁸ The fibres from these *penko* (*penco*) plants were also used in thicker form to make *cuerda*/rope, used as building material – specifically, in securing *paja*/straw-grass to the wooden frames of thatched roofs, themselves lashed together with the same kind of rope.

⁶⁹ At the time of Agrarian Reform, the '*comunidad*' was not a legally recognised or constituted entity. The '*Comunidad*' was instead how those who had organised and campaigned for land redistribution referred to themselves collectively. The leaders and more renowned residents of the *hacienda* at San Isidro at that time were remembered as the 34 *wuasipungueros*/*huasipungueros*. In 2011, different, divisive claims to this *patrimonio* persisted – one family claiming that it was the 'family inheritance' of their family alone (v. Chapter 2).

should now make one just for San Isidro. The history, the people, but especially the various forms of patrimony – everything that we are so fortunate to be surrounded by.” Over the next few weeks a small project-group met to discuss ideas, sources and information for such a publication. By the time I left, a lot of material had found use in other projects, and the book itself was yet to be completed. Labelled photographs of the patrimony of San Isidro – with a particular focus on regional flora – were displayed in the *casa comunal*. Interviews with older residents were recorded and transcribed, and added to a growing community archive of documents, texts, images, donations and tools. Short films were made documenting alpaca husbandry and the kinds of work required on the irrigation system.

At another book meeting, Myriam picked up on the UNESCO inclusion of *intangible* (non-physical) elements (certain dance traditions, for example), describing the “*herencial* inheritance... that you can see” including land, water, the páramo, certain plants and crops, as well as that which it is not possible to see – certain knowledge-practices (*conocimientos*). Rocío (Simaluisa, Don Rocendo and Sra Luz’s daughter) also fleshed out the term’s significance, going beyond the built environment (the chapel, the *casa comunal*) and including “the struggle of our community leaders – past and present – which benefits all of us... these are things that cannot be sold, cannot be divided – and cannot be changed or erased.”

On the table were notes gathered from various sessions on the topic of *patrimonio*, organising suggestions under headings derived from UNESCO documents published in Ecuador. There were five main headings: *patrimonio de respeto* (protected patrimony) to include rivers, lakes, ruins, mountains along with sacred or medicinal plants as ‘natural patrimony’; *patrimonio construido* (built patrimony) including places of worship and communal sites; *patrimonio de la sabiduría cotidiana* (practice patrimony [of everyday wisdom]) which covered *destrezas/técnicas*/skills and *saberes/conocimientos*/knowledge-practices; *patrimonio simbólico* (symbolic patrimony) for *creencias*/beliefs and *valores*/values; and *patrimonio vivo* (living patrimony) for well-known and respected individuals.

Following clear rubrics like this allowed for more things to be included. In the group sessions, for example, alpacas had been volunteered as important characters from the natural world to be protected, though only later and as part of *patrimonio de la sabiduría cotidiana* was the medicinal use of alpaca fibre included. Whilst the *hilo*/thread/yarn and *fibra*/fibre from alpaca fleece is used in knitting clothing, occasionally it would be used also as a comforting, protective measure – at home, I saw Rocío (Copara), on more than one occasion treating an unpleasant headache by putting a small tuft of alpaca fleece in each ear and wrapping her head in a scarf.

Máchica

In the group workshops, by contrast, when any criteria for inclusion were not so clearly defined or laid out beforehand, suggestions tended toward the same sites of interest: particular features of local landscapes, medicinal plants, some vegetables that many people grew, communal buildings, certain birds and animals. Highly visible, undeniable geographical features were readily recalled and volunteered, as were features – both static and alive – associated with and found in the páramo. The making of *higras* bags was the one ‘practice’ that usually came up.

This meant there were some quite striking, to my mind, omissions. Take *máchica* (*machika*: toasted barley flour), for example. Added to hot drinks, this ingredient appeared regularly, in numerous different settings. Often served and consumed in convivial settings, but not reserved as a food only for festivities. Visible occasions included its role as part of the annual December *fiestas* or, in particular, as a key ingredient (when mixed with black maize flour) in *colada morada* (Fig.21), the rich, sweet, dark-burgundy drink that every year accompanies events and family gatherings around *Finados* (2nd November, All Souls’ Day, known elsewhere as *Difuntos*). Still, *máchica* also featured in much more regular activities and in daily life – more often than not due to its particularly fortifying properties. Combined with sugar and a hot drink (usually made from aromatic plants, to make *chapo*), it frequently accompanied physical labour and time spent in colder climes. As such, a large bag of *máchica* was a staple ingredient in the supplies sent up to the páramo

base-camp every week. A warm mug of *chapo* at dawn there could galvanize you into the day's work – and at the end of the day was frequently my saviour, seemingly soothing aching bones.



Figure 21 – tía Sandra (l) and tía Rosa preparing *cuy* and *colada morada* for *Finados*.

Equally, the preparation of *máchica* might just as soon occupy an evening (once everyone had been fed and was preparing for bed), both in consumption, and in preparation. For example when tía Senaida used a large wooden spoon to rustle the toasting grains of *cebada*/barley around a large, flat circular metal dish – small handles on either side – in her mother's kitchen out-building. She had to take care not to burn herself on the fire below, made up of off-cut branches from a eucalyptus tree felled earlier that day for *leña*/firewood by a neighbour with his chainsaw. The fire filled the room with sumptuous, vivid smoke, engulfing the senses. Tía Senaida's elderly mother, Sra Enriqueta (Fig.22), sat by the fire whilst a tiny kitten perched in the corner on a tree-stump meowed in miniature and nearly lost its balance. Also there was Sra Enriqueta's grand-daughter Natalie, trying to read schoolbooks amongst the shadows flickering from the flames against the soot-darkened, bare

concrete walls, sitting on another stump-stool beneath the light of a single electric bulb. Above her on the metal crossbeam hung maize, drying into crisp golden shades of parched reds and dusked yellows.



Figure 22 – Sra Enriqueta Guamán

The important presence of *máchica* at annual events and in moments of remembrance was regular and dependable. At the same time, it was woven into rooted everyday settings, such as the one described above. However, its use and existence were perhaps so familiar as to not seem conspicuous. Even when described as *comida típica* (a traditional/regional food), its significance was usually expressed through a particular taste or preference for it – it wasn't identified as *patrimonio*. This contrasts with other areas in the region, for example in Zumbagua parish (also in Cotopaxi province) where “drinking *máchica*” has been described as a definitive marker of identity, something that people strongly identify with, and protect or comment upon (Weismantel 1988: 161). In this context, *máchica* became a term for self-identification in the region, where only those people who live and farm at altitudes higher than the upper limits of maize cultivation would be people who ate barley (Weismantel 1988: 161). Since maize grows in San Isidro, we would expect it to occupy a different place in the dietary and imaginary worlds of those who live

there when compared with people living at the higher altitudes of Zumbagua where it does not.

Still, the fact that *máchica* was such a prominent feature of both ritual and everyday life in San Isidro, and at the same time absent from most people's descriptions of *patrimonio*, suggests at least two things. First, that the process of identifying *patrimonio* was still quite unusual, and was not a description that the majority of San Isidro residents were in the habit of applying – or not – to features of their own lives. Second, and I think more important, is the sense that these workshops and actions that sought to further establish what was to be considered *patrimonio* were much less significant than opportunities to gather together and collectively commemorate or praise shared *patrimonio*. That is, the *identification* of community *patrimonio* was secondary to its celebration. In recent years, annual festivities in San Isidro have expanded to incorporate just such a kind of celebration.

II. Celebration: *Palabras* and the Thanksgiving Ceremony

Preparations

The night before San Isidro's December *fiestas* were due to take place, Sra Nancy Rojas and Sra Luisa Vega were coordinating a small group of women in the school's kitchen: last-minute preparations for the coming two days of festivities. Sra Luisa's son sat close to the fire, offering to keep it stoked with logs – but careful also to keep out of the way of the busy cooks. Still at primary school, his main job here was to stay out of trouble. Last time I saw him, he was helping dig weeds out of a small potato plot with his maternal grandfather, Don Aguilar – someone old and venerable enough that when people were asked to identify 'living patrimony,' well-known women and men in the community of the elder generation, his name was volunteered first.

Cooking for the fiestas filled a number of days and nights in the week leading up to the scheduled festivities. On this night, on the large, open fire, *cuy* crackled above the embers, skewered on thick wooden stakes. A cloud of grey smoke hung in the air, filling the upper half of the room, and the neighbouring canteen hall. Another year's activities gradually adding to the blackening of faded yellow walls. A few flecks of ash floated in the smoke around the kitchen, forming a soft litter of specks on the narrow-brimmed fedora of Sra Carmen, who was also there with her three children. Periodically she took off her hat and briskly dusted it off, before returning to her task: basting the uncooked *cuy*, ready for roasting, with *achiote* (annatto with chilli) from a brush cut into the end of a large spring onion. Her youngest son yawned wearily, tucked his sunhat behind his ears and sat himself down on a wooden bench by the large catering sinks, on the opposite side of the room. As the cooking tasks were nearing completion, this was where we gathered before heading out into the night.

Those keen enough to brave a 45-minute drive standing in the open back of a pick-up truck were ready to head up to Reservoir Number 2, part of the irrigation-water system located at the end of a steep climb, up the hill from San Isidro, above the community of La Playa. As the crow flies, this is perhaps just over a mile away. Travelling by truck, however, meant following the crumbling cobbled track that takes a long route round, turning off the main road to Cusubamba at San Nicolás, then winding steadily up to pass through Chirimbe, San Alfonso and, eventually, La Playa.

As we waited for everyone to arrive in the kitchen, the school's supply of mugs – some tin, some plastic – were passed around, and we waited in turn. Sra Nancy grabbed the handle of a huge pot with two hands through a tea-cloth, and heaved it from its perch bubbling away on one side of fire, hauling it to the centre of the white tiled floor, itself muddied and wet under the feet of all these visitors. She and Alberto Rojas handed around a cup to each of us, full of steaming-hot *cafecito* (*agua aromática*) – water infused with fresh *manzanilla* (camomile) and sweetened with *panela* (unrefined cane sugar) chipped off a round, rock-solid block fifteen inches by

six, wrapped in newspaper on the nearby worktop. Some of us dug the small spoon passed around into a bag of *máchica* and stirred a few heaped scoops into our mugs. The resulting thick, warming *chapo* drink was just the thing to help steel ourselves for the icy-cold ride that awaited us.

For weeks before this date, plans had been drawn up, discussed, reviewed and refined ahead of the *fiestas* themselves – a continuous back-and-forth between: members of the *directiva* (community council); residents attending regular community meetings; those with particular expertise or experience (who would organise the sourcing of suitable *toros*/bulls for the *lidia*/bullfighting that would occupy two days immediately following the two scheduled days of festivities, would it be Don Graibi again, as last year?); and, of course, this years *prioste/priosta* (festival sponsors) – Don Manuel Chancusi and his wife Sra Pastora Guamán. This role involved taking on the financial burden of providing food, drink, costumes, fireworks and transportation for the festivities and, as elsewhere in Latin America, this demands (and enables couples to express) service to their community (Lyons 2006: 106). The situation in San Isidro reflected that created elsewhere in highland Ecuador, where selection as a *prioste* is similarly considered an honour and creates opportunities to display leadership and generosity (Pallares 2002: 117) as well as to publicly make personal sacrifices for the community (Latta 2011: 162). The *prioste* couple did not rely only on their close kin and familial associates, however, at least when it came to the organisational burden. In that process, as mentioned above, people with specific skills or backgrounds were drafted in.

One such case came with the schedule for the first day of the festivities. After an initial morning gathering of all the *compañeros* in the village square, there had been plans for the whole community to then climb the narrow paths that wind their way up the hillside above San Isidro, and from this procession to gather around the lower of the two irrigation-water reservoirs. This had happened last year. To repeat this, Porfirio had arranged for a friend of his, a priest associated with FPIE (*Fundación Pueblo Indio del Ecuador*) and now based in a southern *barrio* of Quito, to attend and lead a *misá campanal* (open-air mass), at which everyone would be present. The

same priest, Father Fabian, had visited San Isidro a number of times before. A regular attendee at the annual fiestas, he had also baptised Porfirio and Rocío's three children a few years ago, and had hiked up into the páramo in 2010 to bless (and lead a small ceremony of thanksgiving at) the memorial plaque there.

Sadly, however, Father Fabian was taken ill the week before the fiestas in 2011, and so these coordinated attempts to include a special *misa campanal* had to be shelved. In the end a local priest, who took services in the chapel at San Isidro whenever his schedule allowed and when it was deemed necessary (usually when more than one more child was to be baptised), attended and led a mass for the community. This took place in the village square, on the first day of the fiestas. The annual festivities have been held in December for many years, and have acquired significances over time. Most recently, they have been aligned with celebrating the anniversary of the founding of the primary school in San Isidro (which first opened with 27 students at the start of term on 15th October 1993), and are also seen as a collective Christmas celebration. Since 2010, however, another element has been added. The festivities were now an opportunity to commemorate a more recent, coincident anniversary – the completion of the irrigation-water system. As such, plans to visit, gather around and celebrate such sites, to include these pieces of recent infrastructure in the festivities – as had happened in 2010 – were deemed to be too important to be abandoned. And for this reason we gathered that night in the school kitchen drinking hot mugs of *chapo*, ready to make the journey.

Gratitude, Reservoir #2 and a Mural

We had decided to set off at 9pm. By that time a few folk were still arriving – and the second of two trucks that would be making the journey had yet to arrive (Don Adán was already there with his daughter Tannia and son Alberto, Don Graibi was on his way). Leaving at such a late hour, heading out into the chill night – these were elements enough to limit the number of people willing or able to participate. We crammed just over 20 people into the two pickups. During the fiestas proper that occupied the following days, there were closer to 300 people there, as people came

and went – often the total would be more when the main events were taking place (the *pampa mesa* / communal dinner, and the *gran baile popular hasta altas horas de la noche* / the grand late-night dance). It was gone midnight before we got home again.

We clambered up over the tailgate into Don Graibi's truck, gripping the slatted wooden sides to keep our balance as we bumped along the track to our first stop, still in San Isidro – Don Manuel's house. A large white banner decorated with a section of quilting made by last year's *priosta* marked out their house as this year's *prioste* residence. He joined us, along with his teenage daughter Cynthia, and a couple of bottles of what became a staple ingredient of the fiestas from that point forward: unswervingly fierce *caña con piña* (*aguardiente*/cane alcohol, mixed with pineapple juice – the latter doing nothing to mask the former's methylated tones). With his usual winning humour, Don Manillo convinced him to bring a couple of the firework rockets that had been purchased in advance of the grand dance. With that, we shielded ourselves as best we could against the wind, and set off on our drive to the 1-year-old Reservoir #2, the moon a bright bauble in the black sky above us.

At this time of night, there were few signs of life out along the hill-track. Only under the solitary streetlamp beside La Playa's chapel, on the edge of the concrete basketball pitch, did we get chance to greet anyone as we passed. A few dogs scampered yapping after us at points, and their cries were still audible when we unloaded ourselves by the perimeter fence of the reservoir – this was the only sound other than our group's chatter and laughter, and José's tapping out a rhythm on an empty cardboard box. 'Pato' grappled with the cold keys to the two padlocks on the gate. Eventually, the locked chain fell loose against the eight-foot-high wire-mesh fence, and we made our way toward the edge of the reservoir itself – trying not to trip on the uneven ground in the pitch black.

We stopped first at one corner of the reservoir. A semicircle of stones placed on the ground and painted white marked off a patch where flowers and some small flowering shrubs had been planted. Behind them, there was a small mural and plaque

– completed and laid a year earlier in time for the inaugural celebration, the festivities that marked the completion of the irrigation-water system. The mural depicted a scene evocative of the páramo, and of the wilderness and refuge it represents: some steep-sided green hills and small mountains, a vivid blue sky marked by only a couple of faint clouds, a bright yellow sun, a river, an alpaca and, in flight, a bird of prey. It resembled the national emblem of the condor, said to have been wiped out of their one time residence in the páramo by herdsmen who feared their attacks on young livestock. More commonly spotted these days, circling in the vast clear blue heavens, were the *gavilán*/sparrowhawk or *fukungo/halcón*/peregrine falcon. Diego assured me, however, that in the painting it was a *kuriquingi*/caracara, a bird thought to have been sacred to the Incas, and still a presence there.

One weekend, whilst working in the páramo, Myriam and I had been charged with finding – and photographing – as many examples as humanly possible of the birds, animals and plants that live there, and which would be considered ‘patrimony.’ We were lucky enough to see, from a distance, a *kuriquingi/curiquingue*/caracara on the ground rather than on the wing, walking across a patch of short grass amidst the *paja*/stipa ichu/straw-grass. This the kind of green patch, standing out clearly against the sandy-shaded *paja*, where wondering cattle or alpacas would stop to graze, and you would find small, green bulbous bursts of *tugma*/plantago rigida, or wisps of *sunfillo*/micromeria rubigena (a small mint-like plant), or flowers like the orange-budded *chuquiraga*/chuquiraga jussieu/flower of the Andes, and the yellow daisy-like *matico*/aristeguetia glutinosa, found only in Ecuador. Even against such a backdrop, the *kuriquingi* was conspicuous, strutting curiously on long yellow legs, and with a distinct orange mask around its beak and eyes.

Also in the mural was a rarely-seen *taruka*/venado/wild deer, and two small birds, which were first described to me as being *tungui*/Chestnut-winged Cinclodes, but then Myriam offered other suggestions: the *ruku*/pájaro paramero/paramo pipit or *kichi*/gorrión/sparrow (though they looked more like a faithful study of *ligle*/*gligli*/*glic glic*/metriopelia/black-winged ground doves, or of the similarly-sized *perdíz*/partridge birds usually seen closer to the village at lower altitudes). Beside

them, a short tree, its branches used for firewood and known locally as *yuracpanca*, though again there were various descriptions of which kind of tree this might be – perhaps the diminutive *yagual*/polylepis highland tree also used for firewood or, as Diego similarly suggested as being sacred to the Incas, the *quishuar*/*kishwar*/buddleja incana, which grew in the valleys of the páramo. Off to one side, barely visible, was a white-painted block crediting the ‘authors’ of the piece: Josselyn, Tannia, Diego and Milton.

Their work and the scene contained in the mural seemed to be successfully achieving its aims, serving as both a representation and a reminder of the flora and fauna that was to be found in the páramo. It also operated as something emblematic of the relationship set up and maintained by the pipeline – where the páramo was a source (of water) to be protected (and used) by people living and working in San Isidro. The brief discussions on the figures and facets depicted also reflected just how familiar the *jovenes* in attendance were with their various names, distribution, significances and relative importance. Finally, the picture was evocative of its title: the lettering painted in to the scene welcomed visitors to the ‘*santuario del agua*’ which, as Tannia explained, referred both to this particular *shrine* (the plaque and the mural) and to the páramo it depicted (seen as not only where water comes from, but also as something of a nature *reserve* to be looked after, and home itself to a number of *sitios sagrados*/sacred sites).

In front of the mural was a small plaque, already weathered by exposure to the last twelve months’ elements – the black-colouring of the etched lettering all but gone. With a torch and close eye in the darkness, it was just possible to make out the text: “In *Agradecimiento*/Gratitude: to the men and women who have fought with heart and soul in order to have water that might *embellezca*/make our dear *Pachamama*/Mother Earth flourish.” The timelessness of the phrasing somehow concealed the fact that everyone there that night (apart from me), from those just entering their teenage years to those who were seasoned community-members and former members of the *directiva*, were some of the very ‘men and women’ being referred to. The final line read ‘Community of San Isidro, December 2010’ – but

after a few words remembering the construction process and last year's ceremony, the short *palabras*/speeches/offerings shared around the fire shifted to even more recent events in the community.

It took a while to get the fire going. Enlisting Cyntia's help in grabbing one end, José ripped up his cardboard box, which had been brought along for the purpose. Pacho fetched some short lengths of firewood from the trucks, and Don Manillo battled with a cigarette lighter within gusts of wind. A number of folk took him up on his offer of a cigarette to smoke 'for warmth' – even huddled around the small fire once it was going, the air still felt frosty, and only a handful of people there had the benefit of a warm woollen poncho to shelter in.

Ceremonia de agradecimiento

We knew we had travelled up here together for a *ceremonia*/ceremony, but beyond that most of what occurred was improvised, reflecting the fact that it was the first time this particular 'anniversary' had been celebrated. Though arranged to mark the first anniversary, the pipeline had been in operation for about 15 months – an occasion of *agradecimiento*/gratitude/thanksgiving was 'moved' in this way so it could be added to the annual festivities at the start of December. The unplanned nature of proceedings also reflected how hastily they had been organised, at short notice and without knowing who would be able to attend, on which night they would happen or even whether any time at all would be found around the *fiestas* to accommodate another event, however small-scale it might be.

In part compensating for the absence of his friend Father Fabian, but also taking up his more usual role of *vocal*/facilitator in such group settings, Porfirio began proceedings. Things started with a prayer, familiar to everyone there, and moved on into offerings of stories and *palabras*/speeches, amidst the smoke, jokes, *trago*/alcohol and lively discussion. "We believe, in different ways, in Nature, in Our Idols (*nuestros imagenes*)... and in a god of Nature who protects us. And, as we have learned in our culture, we have also taken on beliefs from elsewhere, the prayers of

Jesus... and so we'll say the prayer that we always say, with great faith, with great hope: *Padre nuestro que estás en el cielo...*" The fire crackled as we intoned the Lord's Prayer in unison.

Occasional gusts of aching smoke were caught in the eyes of those huddled on one side of the fire, causing them to look away over their shoulders. Porfirio continued: "In the same way, our Mother Nature (*Madre Naturaleza*), our Mother Earth (*Madre Tierra*), remind us of *nuestra compañeras mujeres*, of the many women who have fought, who have struggled – among them Dolores Cacuangó and Tránsito Amaguaña⁷⁰... and the countless others who we don't see – and our own mothers who are always with us and encourage us (*nos animan*). And so, for them too, we say to god, *Dios te salve, María...*" Again the familiar, mumbled words dissolved quickly in the wind, as folk huddled closer together to try and feel more of the fire's warmth.

After the prayer, Porfirio continued, "This is a very important place (*espacio*), a place to remember all the sacrifice that we have made – that we keep on making (*que venimos haciendo*)... and hopefully this place will encourage us, and remind us how important these days together are... and let's not forget why this is important. We're fighting for *nuestra gente*. But not everyone is here, not everyone is involved with all their heart. Some are obsessed with personal gain, others only act out of obligation, or are trying to oblige other people... But there are those who are fighting... Don Graibi, always dedicated, always working in this project – and here with us now, as in so many moments, along with all those people who, in one way or another, in the history of the community, have kept on contributing, doing their bit (*han ido aportando su granito de arena*)... and so, above all for the *jovenes*, we must remember... and say these things out loud – so that we don't forget... and to recall in our minds the ceremony we held in this same place last year..."

Don Adán spoke next, and continued the theme of the centrality of this project to collective efforts within San Isidro: "Thanks, friends, for this chance to share with

⁷⁰ Dolores Cacuangó [Mamá Dulu, 1881-1971] and Tránsito Amaguaña [Mamá Tránsito, 1909-2009].

you, again – I won't get tired of saying these things – it's worth retelling the story, of what this project has done for our community – for everyone – and how it has been done... for fourteen, fifteen years this projects was dreamed of – the years passed and we saw other *mejoras*/improvements in the community – and now... we place all projects and *bienes*/shared goods, all that will come, in the hands of the *jovenes*... this project that we dreamed of for so long, suffered for so much, and fought for for so long... here, a sacred site (*santuario*) of water, the source of life... I think, *compañeros*... that we must not stop this dear work (*trabajito*) of ours." Shuffles and murmurs filled the short silence, as we waited for the next volunteer to speak.

"As you all know," Don Graibi began, "Nature deserves our respect, and we should also be grateful for that determination (*empeño*), or that goodwill (*voluntad*), or that friendship (*amistad*), shown by our *compañeros*... I think we all here must not forget the many folk who have struggled, struggled for the good of all (*para la bienestar de todos*) – and not just for themselves – to live happily, to live peacefully (*para vivir feliz/tranquilo*)... and that's how we keep on, on this path (*este camino*). For there's no end to the work as long as we're alive... only when we're here now, together, do we feel an end to the work (*el termino del trabajo*)... remembering all those who have fought for us... I'd like to ask God that, for all of us here, give us the blessing (*bendición*) to carry on struggling (*para seguir luchando*)... I've always had faith in this – and I've got faith in you who keep struggling on (*que sigan adelante*)... who have come here to talk, and to give thanks (*para conversar, y para agradecer*)..."

Alberto Rojas, Don Adán's son, was then the first of the *jovenes* present to offer his *palabras*: "This night is special for me for two reasons – time together for what we believe in, and the first anniversary of this struggle... and also, I'd like to talk about another great issue – thanks to our *antepasados*, who have given us everything, thanks to them we have, we have water – and they have also left us the freedom of all, to keep on as we are... we know how they lived, in the past – here I'm talking about the *hacienda* – we know what their lives were like, they have told us – life was just, simply, obeying the *patrón*/landlord... but the truth, as I see it, is that we are still living in *dolido*/pain – the same as times gone by... We're still facing the same

problems – all of us. It’s simply so – the *comunidad* against *el señor*. That day [when I was attacked two weeks ago] – I would have given my life – if it might mean complete freedom (*libertad completa*)...”

Alberto’s sister, Tannia, continued in drawing the parallels between recent conflicts, the community’s responses to them, and the kinds of actions required to see the proper preservation of these natural resources: “The presence here of *los jovencitos* is supremely important... *los jovencitos* who will take on, and as we will take on, the duties (*cargos*) that at the moment our council (*nuestros dirigentes*) have taken on. This is really important – to know what actions, all that the *dirigentes* keep on working on (*sigan haciendo*)... ideas, wisdom (*los conocimientos, la sabiduría*)... in moments like tonight (*en estos espacios*) they share [with us] their ideas, and fill us with motivation... Nature gives us the hope and happiness (*la esperanza y la alegría*) to be able to make things happen in the community... it’s for that reason it’s important that the *jovenes* are here.”

Most of the wood we had brought with us had been added to the fire by now, and the flames had grown slightly in the breeze. Myriam, then the community’s recently-elected vice-president, started her offering with reference to the windswept blaze: “This fire, deep, and full of energy (*energía*) – in this there’s strength (*fuerza*)... and in this circle we’ve made, there’s also strength, a strength that sustains us, all of us, and also all our families – the strength of harmony (*la fuerza de armonía*)... as someone else said earlier, there are people who are giving up the community struggles (*dejando las luchas en comunidad*)... but that’s why this circle is important – we can feel that presence in us, in all of us, to keep on ... my profound gratitude to those who are fighting, but who aren’t here – I think too that we can feel that presence (*esa presencia*) in us, in each of us, to be able to keep on working toward the goals of the community – and one of the most important goals is sustaining our páramo, for everyone... and my thanks also to Nature, to the Earth, to the plants, animals, seeds which, with the water that we now have, are able to keep on reproducing (*seguir reproduciendo*), without harming Nature, without contaminating anything...”

Not everyone there spoke, but since a few people looked in my direction and peered through the darkness and smoke with encouraging eyes, and since this was toward the end of my time in San Isidro that year, I took the opportunity to offer my own thanks, directly to the very people who had become my friends, and to share something of the deep well of sentiment that had been stirred in me. Following suit, I also wished everyone the best four days of *fiestas* to come and thanked those responsible for making the festivities happen, not least the *prioste* who was present (Don Manuel) and the community *dirigentes*. Tannia made everyone laugh saying, “¡Tristan, *presidente*!”

The last person to speak in the round of *palabras*/speeches – before we finally yielded to the cold, doused the fire, and clambered back into trucks for the cold drive home – was Don Manillo: “Though I’m not here very much because of my work, I’m here on the project when I can be, though it’s too small a time... we’ve always got to struggle, to work with that way of thinking which is for everyone... to keep on with this project (*seguir en este proyecto*) – whether we’ve got [money] or if we don’t, the struggle is for all the *comunidad*, with the *directiva* fighting on behalf of everyone... I, for my part, thank Porfirio, and Don Leonel, and thank everyone who lent a hand (*echó la mano*) to make sure this project happened – getting the money for the Technical Survey (*el estudio técnico*)⁷¹... and so now, today, we need to make the best use we can (*aprovechar lo máximo*) of this project... and similarly, of the páramo – it’s absolutely for everyone, not just for any one person – and to take care of it, too... as everyone’s already said, before this fire, this smoke, we commit ourselves, the community, to make good these promises.”

Many of the core concerns and sentiments expressed and repeated – a debt of gratitude to those who have worked for the community, the importance of water, the meanings of such shared ceremonies, the significance of the pipeline itself – were

⁷¹ During the application process to INAR for government funding for the pipeline project, a condition of application was the completion of an accredited Surveyor’s Report, which would come at a prohibitive cost for the community. Various members of the *directiva* at the time, among them Porfirio and Don Leonel, were able to secure funds by applying to OPIJJ, thus enabling the next stage of the INAR application to progress.

framed with reference to key features of *patrimonio* (the pipeline project, the *páramo* hills, the shared histories and struggles of our *abuelitos*/dear ancestors). An evening of celebration like this in San Isidro was not explicitly referred to as ‘community development.’ However, coordinated action to identify plants and properties of the *páramo*, to formalise ways of using it and protecting it (reforestation with native trees, camelid pasturing in rotation) – to recognise and revalue elements of *patrimonio* – these very much were projects of *propio desarrollo*. At the same time, the celebration of patrimony and these short speeches were an opportunity to restate wishes that people had for such work to continue, and to pledge their commitment to it. In this way, working as a community and continuing *la lucha* were explicitly stated as being dependent on such work, and on the various forms of *patrimonio* being celebrated.

The sense of continuity here is paramount, but is concerned more with the creation of a viable future than with preservation of the past. Reference was made to the *páramo*, its beauty, its qualities as a sacred source of water (*santuario del agua*), but more words of thanks were dedicated to ancestors who had suffered in the past (*nuestros abuelitos*), and more still to the pledge and request that ‘we’ would keep on working, struggling, moving forward, operating the pipeline project. As detailed in the following section, three key areas of ‘universalising’ or ‘modernizing’ policies had shaped and influenced livelihoods, living conditions and the political context for action undertaken in and around San Isidro in the past. A contemporary, renewed interest in patrimony did not stem from a rejection of these policies, or even from a reaction to them – in our fireside conversation, no one mentioned ‘modernity.’ Rather, it expressed a concern that various actions should continue, in order to sustain the possibility of life lived in this particular locale. Efforts, struggle and action undertaken in the past were all forms of *herencial*/inheritance and *patrimonio*: an ‘inherited struggle’ emerging from those actions, and facing the dominance of the nation-state (Whitten 2003: 359, 397) and its ‘devaluing designs.’

III. Devaluing Designs, *Mestizaje* and Development Dichotomies

Modernization and Reform

In 1964, the military junta had been in power for just over a year when its leaders took action to tackle what economic and political problems had to be addressed “if industrialization was to be achieved” (Redclift 1978: 23). This was to put a stop to the “semi-feudal labor forms in the agricultural sector” (Haney & Haney 1987: 10) and, in the process, to more closely align Ecuador with the lead policies in neighbouring countries (Wolford 2010: 73). Pallares (2002: 45) cites a Presidential Address from the latter Rodriguez Lara government on the topic of subsequent Land Reform measures in the 1970s, which directly captures this simultaneous response to inequalities and a thirst for modernization, attacking the semi-feudalist practices (Goodwin 2013) not only for ‘the degrading human relations’ involved, but also for the ‘backwardness of such a system of production’ (República 1974). This was understood as ‘improving’ land utilization, a process of “replacing traditional subsistence horticulture with commercial agricultural production for national and export markets” (Stutzman 1981: 45). ‘Modernization’ would be the way to alter these forms of place-based production, and became the basis of ‘national development’ – in Ecuador and elsewhere in the mid-late twentieth century.

For Blaser, ‘the pretence of universalism’ is as evident in the practice and discourse of modernization/development as it was, and is, in imperialism and colonialism. This pretence echoes the embodiment of the “European Enlightenment’s implicit project of making specific local world-views and values, those broadly described as modern and Western European, into universals” (Blaser 2004: 28). It was a project that gained momentum through processes of connecting the history, habits and fate of one place (Western Europe) with those of another (the New World) (Blaser 2004: 30). This aggrandizing narrative, in itself, perpetuates such claims and endows certain historical agents with almost mythical properties. Historically it is too neat: ideas around ‘modernity’ were arguably both a product as well as a cause of colonial

violence, and of subsequent acts of devaluing and denigration (Gledhill 2000: 57⁷²). By imagining it (in this case ‘modernity’ but also, by extension, ‘development’) as all-pervasive, subsequent analyses can miss the gaps and inconsistencies in its universalizing tendencies – endowing such concepts and narratives with a false sense of singularity and durability (Burawoy 2000: 27; Jameson 2002: 40). Nonetheless, as so-called peripheral nations were condemned to ‘asymmetrical integration’ into the global economy (Tamayo-Flores 1993), it became clear that ‘totalizing schemes’ were both resisted and destabilized by ‘target populations’ – “resistance and rebellion are a continuous counterpoint to global advance” (Nash 2001: 14).

The effects of these modernization policies in Ecuador, however, were dramatic (v. Chapters 2 & 4). The chance to engage in wage-labour, anywhere in the country (and latterly, for many Ecuadorians, in countries across the world) brought with it new patterns of migration, new forms of income, and accompanying shifts in the arrangement and fabric of home life. Such ‘socioeconomic implications of state-sponsored capitalist modernization’ are well-documented in Ecuador (as elsewhere in Latin America), where through processes of semiproletarianization (de Janvry 1981) poor rural people began working within capitalist agriculture, urban economies (Llambí 1990) or – as in the case of San Isidro – the oil industry, and thus found themselves operative in a ‘pool of cheap temporary labour’ (Korovkin 1997: 26; Clark 1998).

Whilst modernization and Land Reform measures also sought, or partially managed, to address matters of social justice (via the redistribution of land), it is the effects of migration that are particularly visible today. There was pressure on governmental departments to enact Land Reform as a measure to further equality and emancipation – these legislative measures forming part of ‘prolonged struggles’ for social, political and economic change (Waters 2007: 120, at Foote 2008: 138). Coordinated efforts on the part of indigenous groups and sympathetic Leftist intellectuals in urban areas

⁷² “Western European thought came to depict Europe as a ‘modernity’ bringing civilization and progress to the ‘backward and underdeveloped’: yet European societies’ first colonial territories, in the Americas, Caribbean and Asia, could be seen as the historical laboratories in which the ideas and practices that came to define ‘modernity’ were first worked out (Stoler 1995: 15–16)” (Gledhill 2000: 57–8).

(Becker 2008) had built on the organized campaigning activities of the 1920s and 1930s (Becker 1998; Striffler 2002). Similarly, Bretón (2008: 590) notes that progressive elements of the Catholic Church also assisted indigenous leaders in the negotiation of these reforms (Guerrero 1993: 102). Nonetheless, the redistributive effects of Land Reform were incomplete (Redclift 1978: 27; IRBC 1999: ii), and many issues around land disputes and inequality remained, at root, unresolved (witness the ongoing conflict with the *hacienda* owner in San Isidro).

Following Whitten, in Chapter 4 I described these ‘incomplete transformations’ as resulting in various forms of political and socio-economic ‘liminality’. They can also be considered as ‘hegemonic change:’ where some things (access to the wider labour market) change in the direction of inclusion, whilst others (massive inequality in the distribution of land and water) “remain the same and point towards exclusion” (Wade 2010: 93). This is an economic version of Wade’s analysis of *mestizaje* (below) and reflects the artificial and ideological separation of ‘global-modern’ and ‘place-tradition’ (Blaser 2004: 27). The separation is artificial because both are experienced as being co-existent, and in places such as San Isidro – as the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion in ‘hegemonic change’ reveal – access to one without the other hampers agents’ abilities to engage fully with either⁷³.

In Ecuador, as elsewhere, such policies of large-scale, planned social change (especially in the case of the ‘modernization of agriculture’) have been entangled with the simultaneous devaluation of certain livelihoods and productive practices (Hecht 2004: 66). Indigenous groups have suffered acutely in this respect, due to the widespread, racialized associations (Latta 2011: 54) linked to particular substances

⁷³ This is the position of “impoverished emancipation” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 37) detailed in Chapter 4. As mentioned above, the theoretical division between global-modern and place-tradition is rooted in orthodox social theory that pits ‘capital’ against ‘community’ (Chatterjee 1998) and suggests that “any expression of community attachment threatens to derail the pursuit of universal horizons of advancement” (Pandian 2009: 67). Crawford traces this perspective from Tönnies through Durkheim and Weber, and into the present day: “The move from face to face “community” to anonymous “society” outlined by Ferdinand Tönnies in 1887 was believed to produce a... ‘deleterious disconnectedness’” (Crawford 2008: 180-1; Cohen 1985: 22f.). More recently, the manifold impacts of ‘globalisation’ are interpreted as being divided among degrees of ‘homogenization’ and ‘heterogenization’ (Appadurai 1996), suggesting that ‘globalisation’ is something that ‘happens to’ rural communities (Crawford 2008: 181, 185). This chapter has examined particular forms of action pursued within the negotiation of such shifts and changes in San Isidro.

(Orlove 1998), cultural practices (Lyons 2006: 156), livelihoods (Harris 1995: 364), and locations – in a country where “geography itself is heavily racialized... in the spatial imagination of Ecuadorians, cities – the centers of power and control – are white, while the rural highlands are “Indian” and backward, and the jungle is frighteningly savage” (Weismantel 2003: 329). These associations, often left implicit in public rhetoric (Roitman 2009), fuelled racist discourses used by people in positions of power to ‘reconcile equality and inequality,’ at the heart of which were policies of *mestizaje* (de la Torre 2006: 249).

Mestizaje

In the mid-twentieth century, physical movement between geographical areas was linked to social change along these fixed lines of division, even by sympathetic scholars and politicians: “*indigenistas*”⁷⁴ frequently [made] distinctions among indigenous communities based on their distance from the town and thus presumed level of contact with the social world of *mestizos* (e.g. Buitrón 1962; Garces 1957: 58-59)... [and] the mobility traced out by these discourses [was] more than just movement in space. It [was] fundamentally a movement from rurality to urbanity, from stasis to dynamism, and from the agricultural to the industrial” (Latta 2011: 85). More recently, in 1988, CONAIE spearheaded the call from the indigenous movement for Ecuador to be recognised as a plurinational state (latterly incorporated into the 1998 National Constitution), a move that went some way toward disrupting these associations, and challenging ‘previous governmental attempts to divide indigenous peoples’ and actions which denigrated them with racist terms (Becker 2011b: 145; Postero & Zamosc 1994).

This was part of ongoing efforts to both defend the rights of diverse Indigenous Nationalities and to counteract what amounted to attempts to ‘denigrate the other through denying the legitimacy of alternative, deeply-rooted collective forms of sense-making’ (Kenrick 2011b: 12). Here too we see how racist projections are

⁷⁴ “Mid-century Ecuadorian practitioners of *indigenismo*, referred to collectively as *indigenistas*, were a group of scholars trained in law, sociology, and other social sciences, who took as their principle object of study the indigenous populations of the countryside” (Latta 2011: 78).

linked to the relative importance and value attached to different places and place-making actions. Across the world (especially in relations with indigenous groups) we encounter a narrative in which peoples have justified their own actions by “collectively constructing themselves as Europeans by orientating themselves towards a common future of universal values defined as over and against those who are constructed as if still orientated towards the past” (Kenrick 2011b: 12).

In post-colonial Ecuador, these divisions were both reinforced and renounced by the ‘all-inclusive ideology of exclusion’ of *mestizaje* (Stutzman 1981). Through policy, it sought to address ‘the aftermath of a colonial caste system that divided the nation into white, *mestizo*, Indian and black’ (Latta 2011: 54), by creating an homogenous ‘national culture’ (Stutzman 1981: 45). Dichotomies of rural/urban and peasant/merchant were applied to racial categories of *indio/mestizo* (Ibarra 1992: 39) which *mestizaje* then promised to address through enforcing (in those population groups deemed to be in need) an increase in education, urban mobility, material consumption, and ‘a general embrace of ‘modernity’’ (Latta 2011: 54).

These ideas were challenged at the time, as people wondered just what this idea of a ‘national culture’ would encourage to change, and what would be allowed (or encouraged) to remain the same. At the time of General Rodríguez Lara’s presidential statements, above, such questions were already alive in response, asking “[how were] indigenous subsistence requirements and indigenous communal rights, already threatened by government-sponsored colonization efforts [to be] reconciled with a development policy designed to feed people in the nation’s cities, increase export earnings, and relieve population pressure in the Sierra[?]” (Stutzman 1981: 45). Already ‘development’ is framed in terms of the ‘universalization of prosperity’ (Gledhill 2000: 4), and rests upon the dichotomies mentioned above where the aspiration of prosperity for all comes in the guise of the rejection of the values and practices of those in positions of need.

In this situation, those who have been historically denied direct participation in state-backed processes of wealth creation are regarded as an ‘impediment to national

development' (Pallares 2002: 54). The paradox of persistence and domination on the one hand, and projected transformation on the other is one that today, as ever, serves to construct and further the notion of difference and incommensurability, seen elsewhere in the world in rhetoric surrounding the lives of indigenous peoples (Kenrick 2011a: 194). Planned change, executed along racialized lines, persistently concerns itself with the conversion – or transformation – of particular places and practices. Some more than others, however, are expected to change or are targeted as the site of change.

In the Latin American context, Wade draws on the concept of 'transformist hegemony' (Williams 1991: 166) to illuminate the ways in which *mestizaje* operated through "processes of transformation (of people, of communities, of nations) in which things ('blood', appearance, culture) change in the direction of inclusion, yet other things (racialized hierarchies) remain the same and point towards exclusion" (Wade 2010: 93). There are similar instances whereby national policy has effectively ensured that "when a border is eliminated, it reappears somewhere else" (Virilio 1999, cited by Escobar 2001: 139). Connections may have proliferated and established understandings of 'boundaries' have shifted as a result (Friedman 2007: 427-8), but discrimination persists. Above, we saw the case of Don Ubaldino as an example of countless former *huasipungueros* who put their post-Land Reform freedom to use by travelling to work in other parts of the country. In the process, one set of insecure, unfavourable working conditions were replaced by another, as he and his contemporaries encountered what it was to be part of a 'cheap pool of labour.' Here, as Wade pointed out, the implementation of *mestizaje* nominally removed divisions, via integration, and yet at the same time enforced entrenched visions of, and for, society as a whole.

That racialized hierarchies remained in place reflects the hegemonic content of the concept itself: if *mestizaje* was about transformation, it was more about conversion than integration, since "integration means that the majority must also change" (Saugestad 2001: 161, at Kenrick 2009b: 21). While *mestizaje* was 'an explicit theory and vision of modernity,' as an ideology it carried a "strong subtext of

blanqueamiento, which means whitening in both racializing and cultural senses” (Whitten 2003: 12). *Blanqueamiento* as a term has been used to refer to actions that “imply or manifest a desire to become more like whites or *mestizos*⁷⁵” (Latta 2011: 214). As Whitten (2003: 23) summarizes: “*El mestizaje* is a projection of mixture downward from those who stand atop the class and ethnic pyramid. To move upward in wealth, power, or prestige is to engage in *blanqueamiento*.”

Development Dichotomies: Race and Economy

Despite the fact that *mestizaje* is no longer embraced as a plan for national integration (Latta 2011: 55), such dichotomies of race and economy are still formative in the national setting, not least within the sphere of development. Both exert a limiting influence on how indigenous agency is variously interpreted and denied by institutions and organisations. Between 1998 and 2004, the World Bank-sponsored development programme PRODEPINE (*Proyecto de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros del Ecuador* / Development Project for Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples⁷⁶) sought to promote projects of ‘development with identity,’ or ethnodevelopment (Bretón 2008: 601). This was to fund work that relied on and promoted ‘traditional forms of self-management’, and sponsored projects which specifically sought to ‘strengthen cultural patrimony’ (Andolina et al 2009: 68-9). In this, however, highland indigenous communities were still perceived and portrayed as somehow static, passive and dissociated from the flows and movements

⁷⁵ The term *mestizo* is itself used in different ways in different contexts – scholarly work in English often talks of *blanco-mestizo* society or *blanco-mestizo* people (Whitten 2003: 23) – and, as we have seen in San Isidro, people described as *mestizo* would typically live in an urban area, have received more than a basic education, perhaps be earning a high salary and would display other signs of material wealth. Nationally, “the percentage of Ecuador’s fourteen million people who identify themselves as indigenous is hotly debated and depends largely on the criteria that one might use to define such categories. Figures range from a low of less than 7 percent in a 2001 census to a high of 40 percent that CONAIE commonly presents. About 10 percent of the population is Afro-Ecuadorian... Another 10 percent are the white descendants of the European colonists, with the balance of 40 to 70 percent considering themselves to be *mestizos*, or a mixture of the different cultures, a highly contested and fluid category” (Becker 2011b: 3).

⁷⁶ “Since the first half of the 1990s, the World Bank, alert to the impact of such events as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples... has been paying renewed attention to indigenous populations. It was within this framework of (apparent) respect for the development potential of indigenous cultures [PRODEPINE] came into being. It was publicized by the Bank as one of its most innovative initiatives for strengthening local organizations (social capital) and development with identity (ethnodevelopment)” (Bretón 2008: 601-2).

of (particularly economic) life elsewhere in the region and the world⁷⁷.

As such, projects following this form of “culturally appropriate development” operated by positioning themselves as addressing a ‘gulf’ between the ‘social capital’ of highland indigenous communities on the one hand, and economic markets on the other (Andolina et al 2009: 76). The results of this approach have been critiqued as misguided since they deepened the ‘permanent processes’ of so-called semiproletarianization (Kay 1995, at Becker 2007: 8) among targeted populations. They also furthered a disruptive politics of recognition (Povinelli 2001; 2002) whereby certain cultural claims would be accepted and supported (Bretón 2008: 603), but institutional responses were constructed on unresolved, limiting, and often-contradictory bases (Bebbington 2004: 376). That is, structural issues, “economic injustice, or exclusionary racial formations that often compound uneven development outcomes in the global South” (Radcliffe & Laurie 2006: 245) were, for many, sidelined or overlooked.

Indeed, the call from CONAIE (above) for Ecuador to be recognized as a plurinational state stemmed in part from this paradox where cultural difference and specificity were increasingly recognized and yet, at the same time, that difference was increasingly managed, defined by others and, in effect, authorised – echoing experiences elsewhere in Latin America: “the paradox in this acceptance of multiculturalism is that, on the one hand, it acknowledges and institutionalizes cultural otherness while, on the other, it glosses over anything that might challenge the hegemony of orthodox neoliberalism, thus configuring what Charles Hale (2004) has aptly defined as the ideal of the *‘indio permitido’*: the accepted Indian” (Bretón 2008: 603). Without also addressing ‘exclusionary racial formations’ and economic inequalities, ‘culturally appropriate development’ such as PRODEPINE was thus destined to founder. When CONAIE formally, publicly rejected PRODEPINE, indicating a ‘failure of market-oriented solutions to structural problems of inequality,’ the proposed route forward was not in ‘multiculturalism,’ but in

⁷⁷ Indigenous groups from lowland regions, among them representatives of the Shuar, criticized the Andean focus of PRODEPINE for other reasons – that the project was inappropriate for the social and environmental conditions of life outside of the highlands (Andolina et al 2009: 63).

‘fundamentally refounding the state based on the principles of plurinationalism’: this meant a rejection of neoliberal policies and recognition of a national society that “recognized, respected, and promoted unity, equality, and solidarity among different peoples and nationalities despite their historic, political, and cultural differences” (Becker 2011b: 30; 14-5). The perceived ‘gulf’ PRODEPINE set out to address had been identified as something indigenous communities lacked, rather than the result of policies that systematically dispossessed and denied indigenous groups (Kenrick 2011a: 201).

Following Blaser’s analysis, the shortcomings of programmes such as PRODEPINE reflect both a blindness to their singularity (2004: 38), and an inability to alter their objectives in light of the lives of the people they are engaging with. That ‘singularity’ is rooted in the perception that ‘place-tradition’ is an ‘impediment to progress’ (Andolina et al 2009: 59) to be fixed via various policies of modernization. From a position of dominance, such development policies tend to regard place-based projects that are not their own as actions that seek *only* to protect and pursue localised, traditional or identity-based practices (Blaser 2004: 31). In San Isidro, as in countless communities throughout highland Ecuador, any localised projects or action have long been the result of connection and ‘articulation,’ where migration and ‘horizontal’ interactions have historically been a formative and defining feature of economic life (Mayer 2002: 48ff.; Murra 1978; Salomon 1986: 97ff.). Blindness to this, and to the systems of dispossession shaping livelihoods in these rural areas, combine and have the effect of further entrenching racialized associations mentioned above that are linked to certain substances, practices and locations – and so persistent lines are drawn along the perceived and enforced boundaries of race and economic practice.

IV. Conclusion: *Propio Desarrollo* (Distinct Development)

Coordinated action that either does not conceive of the separation of ‘global-modern’ and ‘place-tradition,’ or that emerges from (and aims at reaching) a conscious, adaptive form of engagement with both, stands in stark contrast to these policies, contesting the underlying ‘assumptions of universalizing designs’ (Aparicio & Blaser

2008: 61). It can also transform the positioning of indigenous peoples between ‘mutually exclusive alternatives defined by others’ (Blaser 2004: 33), whether those are alternatives defined by ideological policies of reform (modernization), nation-building (*mestizaje*) or those rooted explicitly in ‘development’ (such as PRODEPINE). Resolutely place-based activity, then, is not necessarily a rejection of modernity. Such action might be seen as work towards ‘more self-directed forms of modernity’ (Escobar n.d.: 258) or toward constructing ‘alternative modernities’ (Whitten & Whitten 2011).

The actions described in San Isidro, based on specific histories and shared struggles, were not fighting against the universalizing ‘development’ call for greater wealth-creation and more widespread wage-labour employment, for example. Those changes had already taken root. The struggles that continued were instead focused on addressing land-rights, conflicts with neighbours, and generating the care and respect for various forms of *herencia* and *patrimonio* which underpinned so many of the most visible forms of community action. Thus they were forms of action that were not ‘opposed to development’ but were creating *propio desarrollo* (distinct development) – focused on “having a meaningful degree of control over (or, what is the same, having some degree of control over the meaning of) life as being-placed-in-the-world” (Blaser 2004: 34-35). In this light, we might ask whether all ‘modernities’ are in fact ‘alternative,’ since all involve some form of incorporation, or appropriation, of various ‘accoutrements of contemporary life’ (Whitten & Whitten 2011: 12), alongside the attendant, dominant ideas and policies that shape much of people’s lives (eg. increased participation in migratory wage labour).

However, we might also ask whether those involved understand their world in these terms at all, which is to query our own ‘understandings of modernity and tradition’ (High 2012: 897-8). The celebration of *patrimonio* in San Isidro identified and re-valued different *bienes* (goods, or shared goods), including landscapes, shared histories, and former and ongoing struggles. Such acts of celebration also re-stated desires and expectations that people held for these kinds of action to continue in the present, and for the conditions to be created such that future generations would also

be able to continue them. These ‘commonalities’ were of the present: they were not described as ‘traditional’ tools for tackling the challenges of ‘modernity.’ This was not ‘archaic’ (Latour 1993: 73), ‘introverted’ (Massey 1994: 5), or reactionary action looking backwards to a ‘disappearing past’ (Becker 2007: 160), but was specifically looking forward to what was to come, to what could be done – the realm of ‘not yet’ (Bloch 1986).

Patrimonio was something to be celebrated for many different reasons – among them its potential to offer sustenance and motivation for participation in ongoing ‘struggle’ (*seguir luchando*). Rather than being ‘eroded,’ these landscapes, desires and histories – material, moral, and social commonalities (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999: 27) – were being used in action which counteracted the very forces and shifts that would threaten their erosion. Crucially, these actions, along with subsequent forms of ‘distinct development,’ were part of adaptive livelihoods (Whitten 2003: xiii), and took place in light of all the changes and disruptions that had already shaped economic and social activity in San Isidro over recent years.

Coordinated community actions in San Isidro, then, particularly those surrounding the identification, celebration and preservation of *patrimonio*, were collective efforts that appealed to the specific historical and geographical makeup of a place, and sought to both celebrate and sustain those effects and experiences. What were felt to be unique ‘landscapes, memories, expectations and desires’ – named and cherished features of shared life, as found across geographical, historical, social and practical planes – also then formed the basis for rejecting ideas which denied or denigrated those claims and efforts. They were “collective efforts that both emerge from, and seek to sustain, the “uniqueness of people’s experiences of place and self” along with “their rejection of visions that claim to be universal” (Blaser 2004: 26). Collective action that was centred on revaluing *patrimonio* was both part of *propio desarrollo*, and of *la lucha*. It stood in contrast to policies that disrupt or devalue ‘unique experiences,’ whilst also seeking to use elements of *patrimonio* in work that would partially compensate for the deleterious effects of those same policies. These actions of reflection and affirmation were central to the cultivation and perpetuation of

particular forms of communal life, and formed the basis of continued collective participation in 'indigenous struggle.'

8

Conclusion:

Value as Action, Community as Process

“In the emerging process perspective there is a recognition that the macro-level of human-environmental relations, the mid-level of socio-political relations and the micro-level of personal experience are mutually constitutive. There is also the recognition that by bringing together what we have been trained to separate – distinguishing between processes not between categories – we can enable anthropology to ‘reclaim its place as a fundamental intellectual discipline, and one which could contribute not only to understanding the world, but to changing it’ (Eriksen 2006: 129)” (Kenrick 2009b: 47).

I. Reflections (Perspectives)

The preceding chapters have illustrated how collective action, in an indigenous community in highland Ecuador, both depends on and generates different kinds of value. I have analysed how, in combination, these actions and associated values were used to further communal projects, and to defend and secure livelihoods. I began with three main questions: (i) How is cooperation negotiated amidst a diversity of needs, desires, conflicts and motivations? (ii) How do people adapt the material, moral and social relations they deem most important or desirable to the demands and challenges of collaborative activity? (iii) How are these valued commonalities – particular ideas, relations and resources – altered and (re)constructed over time?

In order to answer these questions, and in detailing the ways in which people organised and applied their time and creativity, this research has drawn on anthropological theories that understand value as a measure of the importance of human actions (Graeber 2001). Throughout the thesis I have developed a ‘process perspective’ (Kenrick 2009a/b), examining the co-creation of both material and ethical value (Lambek 2013). This has analysed not only the products and ‘achievements’ of action, but also the relations that action fosters and relies upon, at

the heart of which are people's conceptions and ideas of what is valuable (Ortner 1984: 152). I have shown how forms of coordinated action both transformed, and were shaped by, their relational 'consequences': different intersubjective experiences; the criteria people used in evaluating possible future actions; the expectations people placed on each other; and their contribution to specific principles and practices. The research has thus questioned what shapes and influences people's capacities and tendencies to value things. As such, I have detailed the social, economic, and political factors enabling and constraining these actions, and how they contribute to ongoing struggles to reorder social and economic relations.

Events in San Isidro, then, and the account I have presented of them, offer a particular perspective on the broader issues that took me there: the shaping of rural futures, struggles for access to land and water, community action in conditions of uncertainty, and the impact of policies that assume their outcomes to be inevitable. The various constructions and actions of the *comunidad* were at the centre of these shifts. Residents and families relied to different degrees on the resources and support that the community offered, and competing commitments were distributed among people and places. Contributing to coordinated action in San Isidro – reluctantly or excitedly, quietly or conspicuously – occurred in exchange with these commitments, which meant that individual roles changed over time. The kinds of collaborative action and interaction that constituted the *comunidad* saw the 'community' emerge as both a valued practice and an organisational form (Chapter 5): the *comunidad* was both the 'imaginary whole' (Sutton 2004: 375) that gave meaning and recognition to people's individual and collective actions (Chapters 2 & 7), whilst also referring to the structure of organisation that enabled and coordinated those same actions (Chapters 5 & 6).

In Chapter 5, we saw how the action and authority of the *asamblea comunitaria* – a form of practice expected within the structure of regional indigenous organising – had been transformed into a 'social value.' Through public processes of 'conspicuous' deliberation, and the shared expectation of abiding by the *asamblea's* decisions, cooperative action as part of the *asamblea* had become a goal in itself –

the setting of shared values (cooperation, respect, responsibility) bound up with the active pursuit of them (Widlok 2004: 59). In Chapter 6, the formal processes of San Isidro's organised activity were shown to facilitate work as part of the broader Indigenous Movement: undertaking action as a *comunidad* became a means of engaging with the Movement, and of being a mutually 'legible' collective agent within it. A cooperative campaign was made possible despite the differences in priorities among participating communities, including conflicting notions of identity and indigeneity. A focus on the creation of value examined these dynamic and 'continuing processes' of collective action (Gellner 1987: 168; Baumann 1999: 90), with particular reference to how 'community' was both continually 'enacted and enunciated' (Bhabha 1994: 178) and also constructed 'dialectically from above and below' (Grillo 2003: 160).

The dialectic construction of community is of particular importance in the context of indigenous politics in highland Ecuador, where 'community' has been used as a tool of governance and social control and, at the same time, has been associated with 'unity and solidarity' as the "discursive terrain on which alternative political projects are constructed and legitimated" (Lucero 2003: 40-1). Colloredo-Mansfeld describes a 'structural conformity' throughout the region that has prevailed across diverse occupations and livelihoods, where indigenous communities self-consciously 'create themselves in the same political image' as each other (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 204). San Isidro had adopted this 'structural conformity' and, as a recognisable member of OPIJJ and the broader movement, had been able to benefit from these networks of support and mobilisation. At the same time, however, San Isidro was quite conspicuously distinct in relation to neighbouring communities.

Through his work with MICC, Rodrigo Tucumbi was closely connected to all fifteen member-communities of OPIJJ. In his eyes, San Isidro was clearly different among them in how its material, moral and social relations had been formed and reinvented in the years since Agrarian Reform – particularly in terms of the use of shared páramo lands (Chapter 2); the extent of labour migration for work in the oil industry (Chapter 4); the ongoing conflicts with their neighbouring hacienda-owner (Chapter

5); and the recent scale and successes of communal projects (Chapter 7). Certainly there were things that made San Isidro ‘atypical’ in its locale: the extent to which *regular* labour remigrations had been incorporated into community life; the pronounced income disparities between residents (in terms of the relative wealth acquired by a few households); and how recently it had registered legally as a *comunidad*. The political details of legal registration as an indigenous community are specific to this region of the country. The remaining two ‘trends,’ however, are seen in different forms in countless rural communities throughout the world. These are places “where globalization is happening” – their residents are “on the productive frontier of capitalist expansion” (Crawford 2008: 178). The ever-increasing pressures of economic inequality, the sacrifice of time and absence linked to delocalised labour practices – San Isidro residents were critical of just how established these dynamics had become in communal life (Chapter 4). At the same time, they had incorporated them into constructions both physical and social.

This research, then, has examined ‘community’ as it emerges in a number of guises: as political unit, as a collective agent, as a project that ‘rests on the collective defence of cultural and practical resources,’ and as a shared undertaking that can “shelter the personal effort to build and defend a life and then fight to gain respect for that life nationally” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 15). In this sense, individual communities are not “a big part” of political life – but they are the ‘ligaments’ of a national movement (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 3). Similarly, it is households (as distinct from families [Hamilton 1998: 262]) that in rural communities across the world are not “a big part” of the economy, but are actually “the primary unit of production” (Crawford 2008: 178). Chapter 4 explored the kinship connections that enabled certain forms of labour migration, the gendered roles associated with different kinds of work, and elements of the different economic arrangements constructed within households that were home to a migrant labourer and those that were not. Future research would benefit, however, from exploring in greater detail the organisation of household economies, building on observations in this study: decreasing dependence on agriculture (a trend counteracted by the building of the pipeline), increasing burden of work for spouses (all women) of regular migrant labourers, changes in patterns of

childcare as youngsters migrate earlier, the role of livestock rearing and other home-based cash-earning work in the face of increasing outside labour precarity.

Anthropological writing about communities (especially indigenous communities across Latin America) often emphasises one of two extremes: either representing the group as a halcyon dance of solidarity and calm cooperation, or describing naught but such conflicts and contradictions that the existence of a community (let alone its ability to act collectively or politically) seems an outright impossibility (Lazar 2012: 220). This leads us to ask, how do the communities concerned see themselves? Life in San Isidro encapsulated both poles at once. Long-running conflicts were entrenched to the point where a small number of families lived in relative isolation from their neighbours and *compañeros*. At the same time, recent successes in communal projects made the time I was there for fieldwork something of a ‘hopeful moment’ in the life of the community (more on this below). I have analysed the relationship between positive impacts of collective action in San Isidro, and the instability, ruptures and conflict involved – and I have emphasised how collective action has continued not only in spite of these issues, but also partly because of them. Harmony and agreement were not prerequisites for the continuation of action.

Continued efforts to sustain the *comunidad* – just as with the work of communities elsewhere to make and remake themselves – were disputed, uncertain, and open to failure, shaped by the “diverse understandings of what people believe their community to be and what they imagine it should become” (Robertson 2012: 186). As much as the community took shape through being an entity defined by legal rights, inherited land and familial relations, its ongoing existence emerged from the ever-unsettled realm of action – the possibility of living as a *comunidad* had itself become an intentional endeavour.

Intent and inheritance were combined, and expressed, amidst disputed histories and ongoing conflict. To inherit/intend had become associated with clashing notions of instability and permanence – another dimension to the ‘liminal’ experience of fashioning livelihoods in San Isidro (Chapter 4). People’s criticisms of their own

community reflected the sense that boundaries – of place and identity, and also of time – were shifting. Coordinated forms of action and interaction that residents continued to make time for, and contribute to, affirmed notions of value attached to particular principles and practices. These included: the social significance of shared work (Chapter 3); a commitment to public processes of deliberation and decision-making (Chapter 5); solidarity and support in connection with neighbouring villages (Chapter 6). These actions were undertaken at the same time as residents negotiated different roles that derived from intersecting positions of inequality. Thus meeting material needs involved diverse arrangements of individual, familial and communal work. Distinct forms of collective activity interacted with unequal participation in the flows of people and things that both delineated opportunities and possibilities, and experiences of exploitation and discrimination (Maeckelbergh 2009: 228).

The constitution of outside pressures, opportunities and ‘forces,’ however, appeared very differently to different people, especially in relation to labour migration (Chapter 4) and political participation (Chapter 6). Some drew on their personal experiences with the wider Indigenous Movement to identify the commonalities between challenges faced in San Isidro and those encountered elsewhere in the country, and would describe many of the changes to livelihood practices as being linked to people ‘beginning to see the world in a very different way,’ as Porfirio put it (*empieza a mirar la vida el mundo en una forma muy distinta*). Others, meanwhile, had successfully pursued careers that balanced an income earned elsewhere in the country with continued participation in the work and affairs of the community as a whole (Chapter 4).

II. Contributions (Narratives)

This research contributes to a currently expanding body of anthropological work on value, and in particular to debates that re-examine the relationship between value and values. I have not only ‘brought in’ a focus on action in the creation of value (Widlok 2013), but have specifically looked at the experiences and relations involved in different kinds of coordinated activity, and how these relate to both the ‘products’

and ‘consequences’ of action (Lambek 2013). Using Lambek’s account of material value and ethical value, I have illustrated how certain active processes are implicated in the simultaneous creation of both value and values, where the latter include the expectations, desires and relations that result from action – outcomes which go on to form the basis for future actions and other forms of cooperative activity.

In this sense, I have examined value *as* action (cf. Otto & Willerslev 2013a/b), and collectivity as the coincidence of diverse value projects (Sutton 2004: 374) – using this line of inquiry to analyse dynamics of division and collaboration. Amidst these tensions, I have investigated how community-members: coordinate efforts to secure what they hold to be vital or desirable; create and respond to opportunities to develop this work; and (re)evaluate the relationships and methods involved. We have seen how particular forms of action, as a mode of human togetherness (Arendt 1958), have been used to challenge long-standing inequalities and address material needs, whilst at the same time shaping the ‘criteria by which people evaluate specific desires, and each other’ and influencing people’s expectations and outlook (Graeber 2005: 446). Approaching value *as* action in this way involved examining how people’s diverse capacities and tendencies to value things were constructed, generated, shaped and maintained – these were variously influenced by (i) historical shifts and events, such as the context of power and land relations (Chapter 1), Land Reform (Chapter 2), and ‘modernization’ policies (Chapter 7), as well as (ii) the relational impact of ongoing collective practices, including *mingas* (Chapter 3), the *asamblea* (Chapter 5), and the identification and celebration of *patrimonio*/patrimony (Chapter 7).

This approach to value, then, relates ‘the analysis of action in a particular place at a particular time’ to the ‘social and historical totalities within which they are embedded,’ as one way to ‘highlight moments of pure possibility, difference, and brute confrontation’ (Pedersen & Eiss 2002: 287). This research has documented and analysed forms of action that not only highlight possibility and struggle, but are themselves consciously pursued as a way to reconfigure the very purposes and potential of collective action – where value is both affect and effect (in the ethical

sense, as relational consequences and transformations, and in the material sense, as measured by the tangible products of action).

Carrithers (2005) describes anthropology as a ‘moral science of possibilities,’ and the process of doing fieldwork as ‘destabilizing’ and ‘decentering’ in that we encounter – and confront – some of the very visceral implications of both ‘possibility’ and ‘difference.’ Implicated in other people’s lives as never before, I myself was struck afresh by the world’s echoing absence of inevitability – it’s a deceptively simple thought that ‘things could just as well have been otherwise’ (Musil 1978, at Carrithers 2005: 435). But things are as they are. Action that sets out to change the current situation thus re-articulates the temporality of possibility – enacting the ‘very existence of potentiality’ and embodying ‘the actuality of contingency’ (Agamben 2000: 75-6). Cooperative action in San Isidro brought life to the thought that *things need to be otherwise, and can be*. The focus on action and value I have adopted to examine these dynamics thus lends itself to parallel, or future, studies of collective action, community, and indigeneity (v. Section III, below).

This focus also contributes to current debates in the regional literature dealing with issues of collectivity and identity. I have focused on the relations and interactions that are involved in communal action, and have argued that certain social forms both generate and depend upon coincident notions of value (eg. the *mingas* in Chapter 3, and the *asamblea comunitaria* in Chapter 5). This draws together the relational and processual with the formal and instrumental, and opens up our analysis to the links between collective action and everyday life, without being limited to moments of political upheaval, when the force or security of collective action fulfils an instrumental need or the ability to meet a challenge. I chose to look at the critical events in Chapter 5 (conflict with the hacienda owner) and Chapter 6 (the campaign against the *brocoleros*) not only in terms of problems that were solved and political ground maintained or defended (how and why communities came together in a time of need), but also in terms of their effect on continuing efforts in San Isidro to sustain itself. The two are of course interwoven, and the potential of either (mobilisation ‘events’ and direct political intervention on one hand; ongoing, everyday action on

the other) is diminished in the absence of its complement (as illustrated in Chapter 6).

On the national scale, this relationship is one between individual communities, and the broader Indigenous Movement. Studies of indigenous political action in Ecuador have been accused of recreating, and instigating, established narratives around this action. Colloredo-Mansfeld observes that in activist accounts (and in researchers' analyses) there often appears a 'rehearsed narrative arc,' triumphant in tone, which praises the recent history of peasant-Indian political transition (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 82). In it, "a world of nearly landless peasants shuttling between their plots and fruitless jobs finds redemption through community, indigenusness, and activism" (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 83). He cautions against any misleading assumptions of harmony and resolution-in-action because indigenous experience in Ecuador is so diverse and often conflicting (between regions, but also between neighbours), and against accepting the idea that rural organising 'exists independently of urban careers' and networks (ibid.).

Many people in San Isidro would fit the broad description of 'nearly landless peasants shuttling between their plots and [distant] jobs,' and I have given an account of some of the things that action undertaken as a community, and as part of the indigenous movement, has achieved and led to. This has not been triumphant in tone, however, since there were very few in San Isidro celebrating the fact that, for most people, the only reasonable source of income was in dangerous jobs drilling oil on the other side of the country, or that the hacienda owner at San Isidro continued to act violently towards their friends and relatives, or that local broccoli plantations polluted the water supply in neighbouring villages, or a corrupt legal system meant that witnesses could be bought and the community's only shared land – the páramo – was still at risk of being seized by a single family. This research has shown that there is little if any 'resolution' or definitive 'end points' in 'community, indigenusness or activism,' and has emphasised the ways in which any one of the three requires concerted effort in order to be brought into being, and to be sustained. The work is – perpetually – unfinished.

III. Implications (Possibilities)

Graeber argues that anthropology has periodically turned to developing theories of value whenever practitioners in the discipline reach a crisis of incapacity, no longer able to adequately understand how and why people are ‘motivated to maintain and re-create’ the abstract or social systems that ‘anthropologists have always been so good at discerning’ (Graeber 2005: 453). Subsequently, moments of reinvigorated interest in value in anthropological literature have either dwindled (Graeber 2005: 447; Edmonson 1973) or, more recently, come close to concluding that an anthropological theory of value is impossible, perhaps even misguided (Graeber 2013: 219; Otto & Willerslev 2013a/b). Similar concerns have been raised about the “Anthropology of The Good” (Robbins 2007; 2009), with a recent motion for debate suggesting ‘there is no such thing as The Good’ (GDAT 2013). In the case of ‘value,’ concerns stem from its vast realm of application (Graeber 2013), echoed in critiques of ‘the good.’ As we have seen, investigating complex interactions of desire, need, power, creativity, and political action, all under the rubric of ‘value,’ resembles an unwieldy theory of Everything That Matters (Demian 2003: 316). Both approaches share a concern with how people create a desirable social world (Haynes 2012), and both have revisited the notion of culture itself, making similar arguments – either as Robbins sees value (“exactly the kind of thing that “culture” is made of” [Rio & Smedal 2009: 49]) or, in Graeber’s words, seeing ‘cultures’ as “fields for the pursuit of certain forms of value” (2013: 200).

In this study, I have chosen to develop theories of value that are specifically rooted in action as a means to examine: the active construction of collaborative projects; contested processes of value creation; and how those involved negotiate the manifold tensions and aspirations that such actions entail. Other approaches to questions of value have drawn more explicitly on Dumont (1980), to consider value conflicts, hierarchies and ‘paramount’ values, developing notions of ‘value-work’ (Robbins 2009) and the ‘articulation’ of values (Haynes 2012).’ In the former, individuals confront, and choose between, competing notions of ‘the good’ as a guide for their behaviour, attempting in the process to ‘establish new value hierarchies, or re-

establish old ones' (Robbins 2009: 284). The 'articulation' of value(s) also involves conflict: 'ideology' and 'social forms' intersect, and individuals strive to embody and 'articulate' certain values whilst interacting with (being in articulation with) other, often competing, value systems (Haynes 2012). Both approaches relate an analysis of value to questions of morality.

My fieldwork took place in a social world "not only rife with human purposes" but also filled "with people actively discussing the rights and wrongs of them" (Graeber 2007: 32). In meetings that often went on for eight hours, testing everyone's stamina and patience, the relative merits and weaknesses of different courses of action were openly deliberated and evaluated. These public discussions were purposive: confronting pressing, pragmatic conundrums and the question of 'what are we going to do?' They were also morally charged, since disagreements arose around ethical, if not existential, dilemmas: the perennial disquiet of wondering 'how *should* we live?' Questions of morality were also deeply implicated in the tangible consequences of action and its effects – on livelihoods, agriculture, familial relations and local politics.

As the violent events in Chapter 5 remind us, persistent inequalities in access to land and water within the Alpamalag valley brought questions about the pursuit of livelihoods directly into the realm of morality and social justice. Similarly in Chapter 6, for those whose crops were withering in an artificial drought, the campaign against the plantations' use of anti-hail cannons addressed both moral and environmental concerns. But what of individual questions of morality: 'how should *I* live?' I have described tensions between differing views on what counts as valuable work, specifically with reference to the lucrative, but ethically questionable, line of work in the oil industry (Chapter 4). These tensions occurred between, and sometimes within, different families, and there is scope for future research to explore this in greater detail. Indeed, in work conducted in prosperous indigenous communities elsewhere in highland Ecuador, the idea of two competing ethics (the 'reciprocities of subsistence' and 'the accumulation of entrepreneurial enterprise' – Latta 2011) have been established in the literature, seen as emerging from individuals' increasingly

globalised livelihoods (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999, 2009; Swanson 2005; Kyle 2000).

In response, an ‘anthropology of the moral’ has been proposed as ‘a more agile heuristic’ with which to approach different forms of intentional and creative work within these communities (Latta 2011). Analytically, this also seeks to avoid relying on categorical divisions that do not necessarily emerge ethnographically (Whitten & Whitten 2011), divisions such as those between two neatly divided ‘ethics.’ This ‘agility’ has been required in approaching the diverse lives of San Isidro residents, which cut across many such categories, whilst also re-inscribing them, eg. the re-shaping of ‘locality’ through regular remigrations; increased communal activity coincident with growing income inequalities; and the re-valuing of agricultural work at a time when land is increasingly scarce. Emphasising questions of morality would open up our analysis to individual reflections on behaviour, the role of different kinds of authority in shaping people’s actions and aspirations, and the negotiation of ‘expectations’ that have here been described as among the consequences of action.

Challenging such neat analytical oppositions is integral to the work of a ‘process perspective,’ which contributes to our understanding of value ‘pluralism’ in action. Colloredo-Mansfeld emphasises the ‘pluralism’ that underpins some of the more visible forms of action undertaken by Ecuador’s Indigenous Movement. Such pluralism illustrates that “value systems *need not* be unified as a condition for shared political action (Cook 1994)” and is dependent on “a commitment to working together precisely in the absence of a broad consensus of what is right and good and worthy” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 212, original emphasis). That commitment has largely depended on “building attentive and responsive relations among groups who disagree” and thus group interactions are: ‘contingent and changeable’; based on the ‘judgments of those present and the circumstances at hand’; and “grounded in immediate interests, resources, and problems, not objective, universal principles (Smith 1997: 22)” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 212-3).

As I have shown, the absence of ‘consensus’ in San Isidro regarding what is ‘right or good or worthy’ was not a barrier to action. By contrast, the ability of, for example,

mingas to be different things to different people has facilitated their ongoing practice: individual contributions of time and effort to a shared infrastructure project did not depend on universal acceptance of particular values and objectives. The pipeline project has meant that *mingas* happen more regularly than ever before (Chapter 3). This regular participation has generated ‘ethical value’ that has been vital to the continuation of the project. In such actions, following Lambek, people ‘acknowledge each other’ and affirm relationships (Lambek 2013: 155). The consequences of such action are ‘values’ in the sense that they shape people’s motivations and, indeed, their ideas about what is ‘right or good or worthy’ (‘re-evaluation’ in Chapter 2). Rather than agreement being a precursor to action, it was often a consequence.

This thesis has also detailed how certain forms of collective action involve similar processes of affirmation and re-evaluation. This has been to show how, in the absence of ‘universal values,’ ‘attentive and responsive’ relations are created in the ‘doing’ itself (Lambek 2013): dedicating time to a communal endeavour and working on communally-held land (Chapter 2); enjoying the ‘performance’ of collective work (Chapter 3) regardless of one’s dependence on its ‘products’ (Harris 2007); enduring, supporting and committing to collective processes (Chapter 5); and publicly (re)stating one’s feelings toward, and commitment to, the *comunidad* and its various undertakings (Chapter 7). Ideas about what is considered valuable and what is valued are shaped and set in the very process of such action. Strengthening notions of collectivity, reaffirming the use and importance of collective work, building ‘attentive and responsive relations,’ and generating common concerns and priorities – these are ‘values’ (forms of ethical value) that are both created and sought through action, both method and objective, and a conflation of means and ends (Lambek 2013: 148).

The first of three final points relate to the political context of action in San Isidro, something quite particular to Ecuador (and its organisation, to the region) – a visible, networked Indigenous Movement associated with social justice and the reinforcement of collectivity, which both draws from and influences parallel

Movements in other Andean countries (Becker 2011b, 2013; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Lazar 2008; Jameson 2011; Pallares 2002). The ‘community-level’ focus of this study, then, not only opens it to comparisons with other rural communities across both the global north and the global south, it also links the analysis to Movement politics more broadly. This research, then, could also be developed in dialogue with studies of indigenous political action and its consequences.

Many readings of contemporary events and political shifts across Latin America chart a “pink tide⁷⁸” and a rise in ‘twenty-first century socialism’ (Becker 2011b). In Ecuador, as in other countries, the contested role of indigenous communities and organisations in politics of ‘the left’ has become both more entangled and more strained. San Isidro, and the networked communities in the surrounding area, is a part of these changes. At some times more intentionally than others, regional political action has challenged (and occasionally foreshadowed) national political trends. Unlike in Bolivia, the prospect of Ecuador electing its first indigenous president seems remote. Cotopaxi, however, has elected indigenous people to seats of provincial governor and as a member of the National Assembly (Ospina Peralta et al 2008: 2928). As a ‘testing ground,’ political heritage is combined here with geographical location: close enough to urban centres to be involved with – or targeted by – institutions of government, whilst also still discriminated against in processes of political and economic decision-making (and subject to silencing and incrimination, as evidenced by the regularity of marches and protests organised by MICC outside both regional and national courts of law).

Despite this particularity to the political context of action in San Isidro, there are also other settings where a focus on the creation of different kinds of value could fruitfully contribute to analyses of action. Collective responses to Land Reform in Scotland, for example, have been compared to struggles for indigenous rights elsewhere in the world – both share in common a struggle against the dominant trope of ‘historical inevitability’ and the subsequent devaluing and destruction of particular

⁷⁸ v. Barrett et al 2008; Lievesley & Ludlam 2009; Building Bridges Collective 2010; Panizza 2009; Burbach et al 2013.

livelihood practices (Kenrick 2011a). Specific formulations of this ‘inevitability’ trope and their impact (as enacted in national government policy in Ecuador over the course of the twentieth century) were described in Chapter 7. A focus on value investigates further the ‘rhetorical work’ demanded, in addition to coordinated mobilisations and political engagement, in collective responses to persistent forces of marginalisation and dispossession. Addressing how ethical values are generated and contested in such action adds to questions of ‘recognition’ or ‘legibility’ (Povinelli 1998; Scott 1986) by addressing what values (and forms of devaluing rhetoric) are implicit in the terms of political action and negotiation.

Similarly, ‘communities’ are often held up as political ideals on both sides of the partisan divide: either as models of efficient self-governance and decentralization (on the right), or imagined as an increasingly threatened refuge from the ravages of globalisation (on the left) – when experience usually involves elements of both (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 4-5). When ‘community’ is being ‘simultaneously valorized and marginalized’ like this (Hann & Hart 2009: 228), we’re led to ask why, and by whom? Recognising the instability involved in collective action, and analysing ‘community’ as an ongoing set of processes and practices, thus enables us to more fully engage with the tensions, optimism, destruction and complexities of social action (Guyer 2007). It also disrupts oppositional accounts of the ‘value of community’ that inaccurately categorize collectivities. Perhaps more importantly still, it casts in a new light the consequences of our analyses, and the role(s) they can play in challenging or reinforcing devaluing, or discriminatory, perspectives and narratives.

Such narratives frequently emerge amidst a second set of issues – those of *desarrollo*/development, which are established concerns (and topics of analysis) across the region and subcontinent. This thesis invites further investigation of at least two themes related to these issues: ‘Buen Vivir’ (Chapter 6) and ‘distinct development’ (Chapter 7). Is *desarrollo propio* (distinct development) ‘distinct’ primarily in its consideration of the longer-term ‘time horizons’ that “human life processes normally entail” (Robertson 2012: 186)? How do understandings of this

term, and actions carried out toward it, vary between contexts? How does it relate to government policy? Is the concept and practice of *propio desarrollo* less suitable to the processes of cooption that ‘Buen Vivir’ has seen? Or has that occurred already? Will Buen Vivir become nothing more than another “new dogma of salvation” (Fatheuer 2011: 28)? Besides offering certain extended rights to rural (and other) populations, what changes on the ground are linked to the introduction of ‘Buen Vivir’ as the basis for national development policies?

Finally, in this research, ‘hope’ has emerged in relation to ‘viability’ and ‘aspirations,’ and in terms of how people saw their individual and collective duties toward their families, and toward future generations (especially around the practice of labour migration in Chapter 4). ‘Hope’ wasn’t explicitly used as an analytical tool in itself. The fact that community-members questioned and challenged the viability, purpose and value of continuing to work collectively, however, reflects on questions of hope, and on conceptions of the future. During fieldwork I witnessed violence perpetrated against community residents in San Isidro, the threat of legal action against *directiva* members, and ongoing land disputes being contested in a corrupt legal system – and yet recent events had also inspired hope. The pipeline project had brought many changes, and had significantly revitalised community action, involving more people in more ways. From this we’re led to ask what the effects of this ‘hopeful moment’ (Miyazaki 2004) were and, importantly, how long they might be sustained, and how. Follow-up research would be able to build a comparative perspective: what are the ‘temporalities’ of hope, and indeed of ‘no hope’ (Miyazaki 2010; Guyer 2012)? In action, what are the negative or limiting influences of no/hope (Miyazaki 2006)? What would be revealed by a detailed analysis of these perspectives along lines of generational and gender differences?

These are also questions for inquiry into other settings of collective or intentional action, since the ‘interplay’ of hope and of desire is implicit in any action that engages critically with the present, creating visions for the (near) future and the realm of the ‘not yet’ (Bloch 1986; Crapanzano 2003). This is to examine the notion of ‘possibility’ – the focus of a growing ‘anthropology of the future’ questioning the

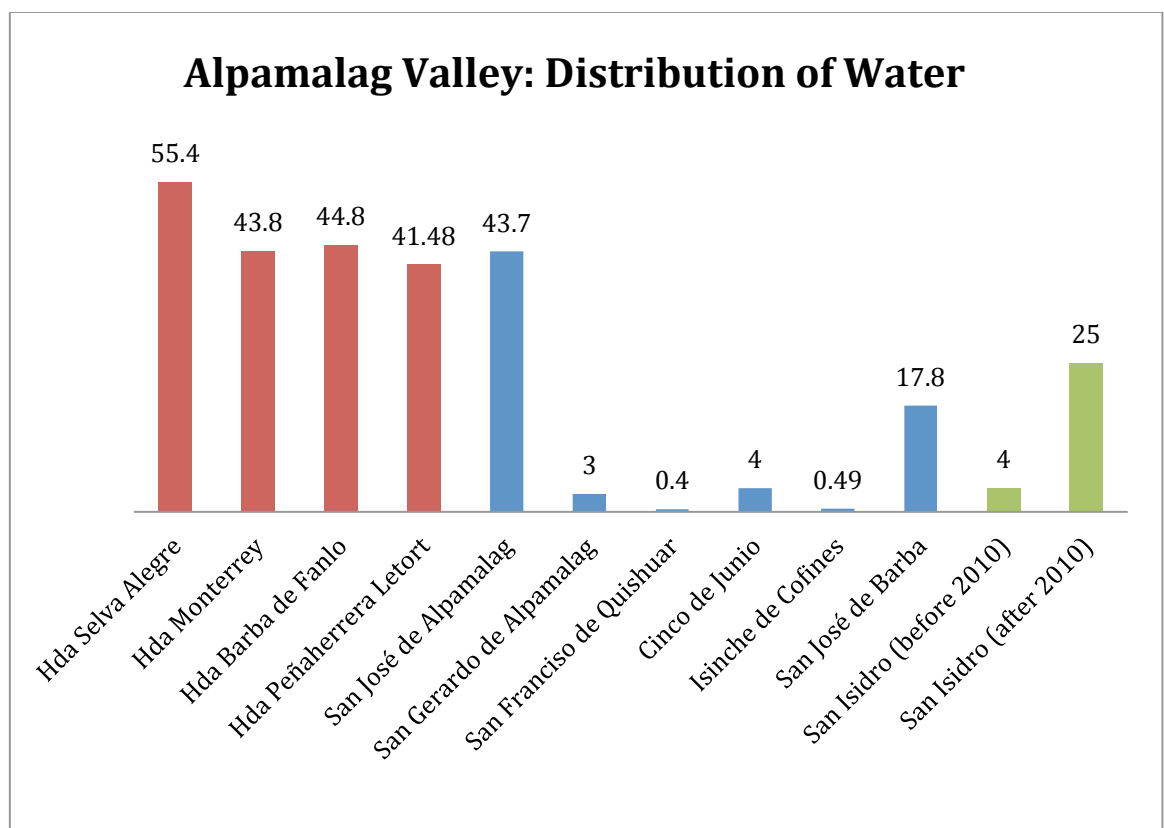
dimensions of the possible in relation to social change (Guyer 2009; 2012), and exploring the “re-weaving and integration of different modalities of space and time” (Crawford 2008: 182). In San Isidro, collective action embodied possibility, and set about ‘re-weaving’ valued commonalities according to the concerns, needs and desires of those involved. Designs changed over time, and goals weren’t always met; what was important was the ‘doing’ (Lambek 2013). When the ends of action remained uncertain, and the means increasingly under threat, value was found in creating relationships that would enable and encourage the struggle to continue. These were endless tasks, only possible in company. As Don Graibi said, to nods of agreement from his *compañeros*, “...let’s keep on along this path, for there’s no end to the work as long as we’re alive ...*que sigamos en este camino, porque el trabajo no termina mientras nosotros estemos vivos.*”

Appendices

Appendix 1

Alpamalag Valley: Distribution of Water

Graph showing access to irrigation water in different locations in the Alpamalag Valley, via the San Antonio Distribution Canal (water-flow rates measured in Litres per Second, from a total of 259.93 l/sec). Data available for four haciendas and six communities within the ‘Zona de Alpamalag’ cluster, used to illustrate how a *hacienda*-plantation owned by one person has acquired licence for 55.4 l/sec, whilst a neighbouring community of 60 families (Cinco de Junio) has just 4 l/sec. Approximate figures for San Isidro included for reference. Source: Cinco de Junio Community Archives (data compiled by Esmeralda Yasig, 2008 – also at: Yasig 2012: 43).



Appendix 2

i. Land redistribution following Land Reform in 1964 and 1973, within Cotopaxi province.

Mechanism	Benefiting Families (#)	Total (hectares)
Liquidation (sale) of huasipungos (1959-1964)	158	473.63
Liquidation (sale) of huasipungos (1965-1980)	3,973	19,313.64
Land Reform awards (1964-1984)	6,966	60,056.3
Colonization land claims (1965-1985)	347	10,225.45
Total	11,444	90,078.02

Average award/sale across the province: 7.25 hectares per family.

Huasipungos in San Isidro were on average only 1 to 2 hectares.

Source: (Flores 2009: 19).

ii. View over the Alpamalag valley from La Playa



The broccoli fields of *Hacienda Selva Alegre* occupy expansive tracts of the flattest, most fertile land in the valley. The large building to the lower right is Hacienda San Antonio, owned today by Italian former missionaries.

Appendix 3

Governmental Institutions and NGOs credited with supporting initiatives in San Isidro

Up to the year 2000, ordered by date:

Organisation	Date	Activity
VOLUNTARIOS EMATOGROSO	1982, 1996	Community Meeting-House construction, Church repairs, Community Shop.
FODERUMA	1984	Individual loans for the purchase of cattle and tubing materials for water pipelines.
FEPP	1988	Credit for a Cattle-Rearing Collective.
VISIÓN MUNDIAL	1988-1997	Drinking-Water system installation, construction of community storage facilities, funding for Health, Education and a fish-farming project.
MUNICIPIO DE PUJILI	1988, 1991	Bridge (access-road), Concrete games pitch
CONCEJO PROVINCIAL	1990, 1996	Piping for drinking-water system and sports facilities.
ORI	1991	Primary Education Program
PASTORAL SOCIAL	1992	Loans for projects in small-animal rearing and fruit-production.
CARE – PROMUSTA	1992-1998	Soil Conservation and Planning for Irrigation Water-Sprinklers.
M.A.G.	1994	Heavy Plant hire for excavation of Irrigation-water Reservoir.
SWISSAID	1995	Soil Conservation and donation toward tubing for water-sprinkler system.
DIRECCIÓN BILINGÜE	1995	Primary Education Program
HEIFER INTERNATIONAL	1996	Cuy (guinea-pig) rearing Project
GUAMAN P. AYALA	1997	Construction of a Hostel
FODEMI	1998	Individual loans for the cattle-rearing.
PRONEPE	2000	Initiate First year of Primary Education.

Appendix 4

Aerial image of Community and Hacienda lands at San Isidro

(modified from source: Instituto Geográfico Militar).



The white lines mark the approximate boundaries of “San Isidro” – the area between them is dominated by the large fields of the Hacienda at San Isidro: the smaller plots clustered on the slopes toward the top of the frame make up the homesteads of San Isidro’s community-members. The red outline to the left marks the location of the Hacienda San Antonio, and next to that is the centre of the community at Santa Rosa de Cochaloma. In “San Isidro,” the larger red square outlines the Hacienda buildings, and the smaller square the centre of San Isidro – where the chapel, *casa comunal*, shop and sports pitch are located. The access track runs along the straight edge of northern perimeter of the Hacienda lands. To the right of the frame are the communities of Cruz Pamba and La Merced.

Appendix 5

San Isidro páramo: route of the pipeline



The white dot to the left marks where the route of the pipeline leaves the frame: from there a line is visible scoring across the hillside almost like a contour line – this is the route of the San Isidro irrigation pipeline. The white dot to the centre of the frame marks the location of the alpaca corral and project *casita*/hut.

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